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GIVE THANKS TO OUR PRIESTS

Have you ever sought the Lord?

Have you ever found him – present in his Word, his Body and Blood, his Body the Church? Have you ever experienced his healing of body and soul?

Do you love your parish? Are you grateful you can go to Mass in the church where you were baptized, or confirmed or married, or your home away from home? Are you grateful you can go to Mass at all? If you no longer can, are you grateful for when you could, and for televised Masses brought right to you?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, thank a priest. They help us encounter Jesus – by proclaiming and preaching his Word, bringing him to us in the sacraments and leading our parish communities and other Catholic groups in so many ways.

This week The Catholic Free Press recognizes our diocesan priests who are celebrating special jubilees this year.

And special men they are, hailing all the way from Ireland, as well as Rhode Island and our own state of Massachusetts. They studied in Rome, Ireland, France, Puerto Rico and Canada, as well as in the United States. Some were ordained for our diocese, others came here later in their priesthood.

They have served around the world, including in Peru, France, Canada and the United States. Some have had special ministries to the sick, Hispanics (here and in Peru), charismatics, college and medical school students, those involved in religious education, members of religious orders, fire fighters, even Allied prisoners and army personnel.

Then there's their more "ordinary" day-to-day parish ministry, which has included such tasks as making church a welcoming place for young and old – and staying to clean up afterwards, as one of these jubilarians did just that more than a decade ago. At that time the pastor was being praised for his dedication and one parishioner cautioned another, "Don't make him sound too good. Someone else will want him. We're not going to give him up."

Grateful parishioners probably have said something similar about any one of these priests.

Perhaps some of them have affected you – once or several times over the years. Why not share your gratitude, and their joy, with them – in person or by letter, e-mail or telephone? Perhaps some of them are unknown to you. Why not offer a prayer for them too?

A simple thank you isn't nearly enough for your countless sacrifices, brothers. Brief biographies and congratulatory wishes don't begin to acknowledge your hours of labor and continual, patient self-denial, much of it unnoticed or not properly appreciated, some of it unfairly criticized.

But whether or not any one of us like or admire or agree with you, it is because of you and your brother priests that we have the access we do to God. Because you rose each morning, no matter how tired you felt, we could catch that early Mass. Because you hastened out into the night after a long day, our dying loved ones received the sacrament of the sick.

Because of your hours of study – in seminary and since – we came to know God better, and know more about him, in our own languages. Because of your contacts with the diocese and the broader community, we could find the services we needed.

Because of your presence, listening ears, good humor and so much more, we found comfort, support and satisfaction, as individuals, families, and groups.

Because of your continued labor and prayers you give us what we need.

May God bless his workers for all ages.