

Priests' Seminar

“I really needed this,” was the comment of one priest at the end of the week. Like many priests busy with their pastoral work, he knew how to give spiritual strength to others but was getting very little himself. One of the Christians in his parish heard about a seminar being organised for diocesan priests and paid for him to attend.

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Perhaps you are one of those Christians who really appreciates all that your parish priests do to bolster your faith. You see them provide you and your family with the Church's sacraments—especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. But who does a priest turn to when he needs help? You may think a priest is like a farmer. Doesn't a farmer have more than enough left over for himself after providing food for everyone else? Well, that's not the way it works. Priests—especially young priests just starting out in parish life—need someone to turn to.

Once a year, the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in East Africa organises a theology seminar for recently ordained priests. The 2018 seminar brought in priests from Kampala, Nairobi and various towns like Ngong and Kakamega, with several coming all the way from the Diocese of Lodwar.

The topic for 2018: Priestly Celibacy. Fr Joe Babendreier and Fr Martin Onyango, both priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, were in charge this year. With decades of experience in living priestly life in many different parts of the world, Fr Babendreier had lots of practical advice to share with the young clerics.

Sometimes we take things for granted, especially when it comes to celibacy. We forget that all the theory a young man learns in the seminary before being ordained isn't enough. It's like a young soldier who sits through classes on the theory of war and then finds himself on a battlefield faced with a powerful enemy who intends to kill him. Of course, it's a metaphor. But it is a metaphor backed up by the kind of strong language that Jesus himself used when talked about "eunuchs for

the kingdom of God”. In the war between God and Satan, half measures and compromises are useless.

Just as important as taking stock of one’s progress in spiritual life, a priest also needs a break in his work routine. The week together with other priests provided a wonderful time of rest.

St Josemaria, the Founder of Opus Dei, used to equate these seminars with the invitation that Jesus gave his apostles: “Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while”; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat. So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves.” (Mark 6:31-32)

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