

Priest to Priest: Taking the Love Affair of Celibacy Seriously; My Experience with Theology of the Body

By Fr. Mark Toups



Fr. Mark Toups, Director of Seminarian Formation
Diocese of Houma/Thibodaux

There's a line from the movie *The American President* that states, "When people are thirsty enough they'll drink the sand in the desert when they see a mirage". How true. While our culture cannot deny the innate thirst deep within, we have grasped at the mirage, drinking it impetuously. And, as a product of our culture, I too drank the mirage - I drank it as a teen, I scoffed at it in the seminary, and I fought it half-heartedly as an ordained priest. Yet, what I could not deny was John Paul II 's wisdom when he said, "the truth of the Gospel is confirmed in the wounds of the culture". While a product of the "mirage", the wounds of my own life were so deep that I was in need of healing.

This last January, I attended the Theology of the Body Institute's Head & Heart Immersion Course. It articulated truth that pierced the mirage, letting me taste the "living giving water" within those aforementioned wounds. The truth of the Theology of the Body grounded my journey of inner healing, for it was one of the keys that Jesus Christ used to unlock my spiritual handcuffs.

I have been a priest for nearly seven years now and I am imploring my brother priests to step into the fullness of their priestly identity. Because of the teachings of Theology of the Body, I have taken my love affair of celibacy seriously - and that renewal continues to transform my priesthood. Now, Mass is more intimate, people are more sacred, and God is more personal. Since the Institute's Head and Heart Immersion Course, I feel as if there is a deeper dimension to my priesthood - as if I'm now experiencing spiritual fatherhood in "3-D HD", whereas before it was merely a functional "silent film".

I can't encourage priests enough to take up a personal study of Theology of the Body, or to attend a TOB Institute class. Whether you are newly ordained, ready for retirement or knee deep in the trenches with too many things pulling at your calendar. ..what more do you want from your priesthood? What more do you want from your celibacy? What more do you want in your relationship with God? God knows the answers, for God already knows your questions. And He's inviting you to dine with Him at the banquet.

Fr. Mark Toups is the Director of Seminarian Formation for the Diocese of Houma/Thibodaux Louisiana. He is the cofounder and Spiritual Director of ADORE Ministries (<http://www.adoreworship.com/>) which promotes Eucharistic adoration and formation across the nation in response to John Paul II's prophesy for a New Springtime in the Church. He is also pastor of St. Luke's Catholic Church in Thibodaux, LA and St. Lucy's Catholic Church in Houma, LA.

As a response to his dream of the renewal of Catholic priesthood, Fr. Mark is an adjunct faculty member of the Institute of Priestly Formation, working with the distinct spirituality of Diocesan priests and seminarians. A college graduate of Nicholls State University; he is a native of Houma, Louisiana.