

One Good Priest Can Make A Difference

Father Roger J. Landry: On the 'Front Lines' for Family Life

BY JOSEPH PRONECHEN

Listen to Father Roger J. Landry for a few minutes, and it is easy to see that one of his main inspirations is Pope John Paul II.

"I read the Holy Father's book *Love and Responsibility* for the first time and it both convinced me why the Church's teaching on human sexuality was right and gave me the tools to persuade others," says Father Landry. "When I read the Holy Father's *Theology of the Body*, I discovered the gospel on human love in all its beauty and I was filled with a hunger to preach that gospel to others."

Ordained in 1999, he first received a biology degree from Harvard, studied in Rome at the Angelicum, Gregorian and Lateran universities, then did advanced studies at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Rome.

"Before leaving Rome, I had the chance to talk with Pope John Paul II briefly after concelebrating Mass with him and other priests in his private chapel," remembers Father Landry. "I thanked him for the great gift of his teachings on the theology of the body and told him of my desire to 'popularize' his teaching on human love in the divine plan in the United States. He smiled. I asked him for his blessing on this endeavor and he said, '*Volontieri*' (with great joy) and gave me his benediction."

Now 33-year-old Father Landry brings the pope's teachings to parishioners at St. Francis Xavier Church in Hyannis, Mass., where he is a parochial vicar, and to eager listeners at frequent lectures and days of reflection he gives in many states.

"In preparing couples for marriage, the young Father Wojtyla tried to introduce Christ's love into human romantic love," says Father Landry, a member of Father McSwiney Council 2525 in Hyannis. "I've tried to do the same."

"So often the Church's teachings on sexuality are perceived by young people and couples as a list of prohibitions rather than as the gospel about how to discover the genuine self-giving love for which their hearts have been made by God," he explains. "John Paul II's teachings have set many of these couples free to love in the truth about who they are, and this is one of the most beautiful things a priest can witness."

"Real joy in marriage comes when human spouses

learn to love each other in this total, self-sacrificing way," he says, referring to Christ's words and actions demonstrating that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

"This type of loving sacrifice takes many forms, such as putting the good of the family above personal desires, saving for children's education rather than seeking personal goods, and having a larger family, even though that always involves some sacrifices. Such love is faithful, fruitful and for life."

One place sacrificial love occurs is in the bedroom. "I have seen several couples turn their marriages around when they heard the Holy Father's appeal for them not to use contraception in their marriage," Father Landry adds. "Some of the greatest conversions I've witnessed have occurred when couples rejecting the full truth about each other and rejecting God in the act of making love, start, through the wisdom of the Holy Father, to 'introduce love' into their own love-making."

He knows his brother Knights have a crucial responsibility in passing on the meaning of real love in the

divine plan. "First," says Father Landry, "by being good Christian husbands and fathers, by putting the love of Christ into action, they will set a good example for the other Christian men in our culture."

Second, "in learning more about the Holy Father's teaching about marriage in God's plan, Knights will become the voice of the Holy Father, translating this teaching into words their friends and colleagues can understand."

Finally, through their support of the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C., Father Landry gratefully notes, the Knights are sending out young priests and lay people to become his "companions on the front lines."

"The Holy Father's teaching on human sexuality, love and marriage has been called a 'theological time bomb,'" says this enthusiastic disciple of John Paul II. "I'm hoping that we Knights can help to light the fuse." ■

Joseph Pronechen writes for the Catholic press from his home in Trumbull, Conn.



Pope John Paul II greets Father Roger Landry and Father Gerard O'Connor in the company of their then-bishop, Sean O'Malley, OFM Cap of Fall River, Mass., now archbishop of Boston.