

No man is an island

A young black priest's journey to help build the Kingdom of God

By Father Joshua Johnson

Thomas Merton wrote *No Man is an Island* in 1955. I have been intrigued with the title of this book and have found it to be true in my life.

I fell in love with Jesus Christ shortly after I received the sacrament of Confirmation, during my junior year of high school. I soon found myself spending intentional time with God every day. I then attended the historically Black college Southern University in Baton Rouge. I continued to spend time in prayer with Jesus in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The more time I spent with God in prayer, the more it became clear to me that Christ was inviting me to discern the priesthood.

I entered the seminary in 2006 and was ordained to the priesthood on May 31, 2014. I decided to model my priesthood after Jesus. I recognized very early in ministry that I am a necessary member of the Body of Christ, but unlike Jesus, I am a limited one. I immediately began praying that God would give me a team of people with whom I could collaborate in building the Kingdom of God.

At our Baptism, we receive supernatural gifts to build God's Kingdom. At my Baptism, I received the supernatural gifts of Evangelization and Vision. As an evangelist, I was equipped by God with the gift of tongues, which allows me to inspire those who hear me share his message. When others hear what God has revealed to me, they consistently get excited about their own relationship with God and his Church. As a visionary, I am able to share ideas that God has shared with me in prayer as I accompany others in their walk toward eternity. Many have seen the fruits of these ideas help them grow in their personal relationship with God and/or in their ministry.

At my Ordination to the priesthood, I was given the gift of being able to share in the administration of the sacraments of the Church. Some of the sacraments I administer on a daily basis include the sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Most of the greatest saints in the history of the Church who were used by God to transform unjust institutional practices and policies immersed themselves in these sacraments on a consistent basis.

Five years after my ordination, I find my days full, but fruitful. I spend the majority of my time walking with the people I pastor at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. I also spend quite a bit of time, by invitation of my bishop, healing the racial divide between Blacks and Whites in our diocese as co-chair for our Commission on Racial Harmony. In the fall of 2018, with the release

of my book, "Broken and Blessed," I have been able to share my own journey back to God and the Catholic Church, while recognizing the challenges and concerns facing my generation and the Church in the 21st century. I also enjoy hosting a weekly podcast, "Ask Fr. Josh." The podcast enables me to share the joy of the Gospel all over the world.

I have been asked on multiple occasions how I am able to do so much work for the Kingdom of God without burning out. I continue to be drawn back to my prayer shortly after my ordination, asking God's help in continuing to recognize my own limitations. How do I keep from burning out? I lean on other members of the Body of Christ to supply what I am lacking.

I remain very intentional about spending a lot of time in prayer before Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The more time I spend with Jesus, the

more I am able to imitate him in my ministry. After spending time in prayer, Jesus spent a lot of time with his 12 apostles. He empowered them to share in his ministry. Likewise, I rely heavily on men and women in my life who share in the call to build God's Kingdom. I believe God wants us to participate in this together. In our collaborative work on the international, diocesan, and parish levels, we consistently witness thousands of people encounter the healing and transformative power of Christ as they fulfill the demands of discipleship in their walk toward eternity.

One of the greatest gifts I have received from God is the Church, the Body of Christ – the men and women I walk with every day. They have helped me prioritize my time in prayer with God. They have also been a gift to me through their ongoing affirmations and challenges. With them I am a better priest because I am just beginning to understand what Jesus meant when he proclaimed that we are all necessary members of the Body of Christ. As long as I am leaning into every member of the Body of Christ and their many and varied gifts, I am better able to use my talents to do the work God gave me in my journey to becoming the saint God called me to be. "No man is an island" in building the Kingdom of God.

To support more vocations to the priesthood and religious life in our community I encourage you to pray, fast, and ensure our young people that you will work alongside them in doing the work of God!

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