

What about the rest of the Catholic priests?

By [Martin E. Marty](#)

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Some of the best things that happen in these [worst times](#) occur among Roman Catholic priests. "Stop the presses!" one wishes to hear, because that claim would represent radical and rare news.

No one can complain, as many used to, that secular media do not pay attention to the churches and the clergy. Ask anyone on the street: she may not know about any of the sacraments or what goes on at mass, but she will know about clerical sexual assaults, covers-up by bishops, and stumbling as Rome fumbles with the issue. The "worst things" make news.

But sometimes even serious critics of Catholic ways find it urgent to speak up. One of these is Eugene Kennedy, columnist and retired Loyola University of Chicago psychologist. He [points](#)

[out](#) that "there is a far larger and deeper territory" than that usually covered in the media. How to find it? "It might as well be the cave next to Bin Laden's even though it can be entered at any time in the rectory just down the street." Despite the agonies related to the sex abuse wars, priests have stayed on the post. And they seldom complain--they are too busy serving on the front lines where human need is most patent.

Still, they hurt. Kennedy quotes a priest who loves his job and loves his people but finds that "an astonishing sea change" has occurred among priests of his generation: "we cannot wait to retire." They are sick of "the profound unending nuttiness (e.g., a seminar on exorcism)" that never stops. Kennedy observes the good but tired priests, hears their stories, passes some on to readers.

Being a theologian as well as a psychologist, Kennedy views priests' "secret lives" in the light of what he knows and what we cannot know of Jesus. "What did Jesus feel," he asks, "and was it really any different from what our best priests feel?" One biblical story tells how Jesus experienced a drain on his energy, just as priests do when human need overwhelms them. "There is no secret about this," urges Kennedy: we just need "to read between the lines of the scriptures."

Maybe we would do well also to read beyond the lines that make headlines.