

August 13, 2020

When I practiced law, one of the things I disliked most was wearing a tie. No matter how loose my collar might have been, it was always uncomfortable. I couldn't wait to get in my car at the end of the day and pull off my tie.

Upon graduation from seminary, one of the more difficult transitions was wearing the clerical collar. The difficulty wasn't because the clerical collar was uncomfortable (though it is uncomfortable at times), it was difficult because the collar was a constant reminder that I must practice what I preach.

When I'm driving around town, it doesn't look good for "the priest" to be tailgating the car ahead or angrily shaking my fist at someone who cuts in front of me in traffic. It doesn't look good for the priest to get mad at the waitress who forgets to turn in my order. I never realized how many times I am tempted to be "un-Christ-like" until I began wearing my clerical collar.

Jesus tells us how to respond in these situations whether or not you are wearing a clerical collar. In Jesus' teaching from Luke (10:25-28), he said "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Whether or not you're wearing a clerical collar, I am certain that Jesus knew that it would be hard to love your neighbor. But just as in all of his other teachings, Jesus meant what he said. It isn't optional. Christ is calling us to respond to those we encounter with love, compassion, and forgiveness rather than annoyance, indifference, or contempt.

The clerical collar serves as a tangible reminder to practice what I preach!

Over the years, I've wondered how we would act if we each wore a clerical collar. If we had that gentle reminder around our neck, perhaps we could live the words of Paul in Romans when he wrote "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

It is difficult, but it is the way of the Lord. If anyone would like to borrow a collar and see what it feels like (physically and spiritually), I've got plenty to spare!