

THE WORD

by JOSEPH A. BREIG

And his mother said to him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?

"I wouldn't want to be a priest," said Joe. He said it gently, as if to avoid shocking me.

"Neither would I," said I.

His eyes seemed suddenly to double in size, and his voice trebled upward a full octave. "Why not?"

"Because I care too much about the priesthood."

He was sitting sideways on a dining-room chair, one leg doubled under him, the other curled impossibly around the chair leg. Now he multiplied the impossibility by leaning his chin on one hand studying me with wide eyes. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I mean that I don't think I'm man enough to be another self for Christ. I'm afraid I'd botch it."

"I bet you wouldn't," he said. "You didn't botch being a Dad."

"Thanks, Joe," I told him; and meant it much more than it sounded. "That's because you've got a good mother."

"Dad," he asked, "what did you mean — another self for Christ?"

"Exactly that," I said, "That's what a priest is. Look Joe. Suppose

I were the world's greatest football player, and I knew I was going to die. And suppose I said to you, 'Joe, I can hand down my skill. I am going to hand it to you. You go out on that field and play. Every time you throw a pass, it won't be you throwing; it will be me. And when you carry the ball, I'll carry it. When you kick it, I'll kick it.' Suppose you did that. Then you'd be my other self. That's what a priest is to Christ. It isn't the priest who baptizes people and forgives sin and offers Mass. It's Christ in his other self Who does those things. And a man who is a Christ's other self ought to be quite a man!"

Joe sat still for a minute. Then he uncurved his legs and recurled them. He spoke slowly. "What kind of man, Dad?"

"Joe, I could give you a quick answer."

He looked at me. "Go ahead, Dad."

"The kind you are going to be. You're the kind."

There was a long silence. Finally he said: "But I'd have to go away from you."

I shook my head. "I hope not, Joe. I hope that the closer you come to Christ, the closer you'll come to me, no matter how far away you go on this earth. If that isn't so, I'm a failure." — From "America"