

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

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“Do this in memory of me.” The words of Jesus Christ to His disciples at the Last Supper are meant to last until the end of time and even beyond time. The new disciples are those men chosen from God’s people to follow His beloved Son, Jesus Christ in the Mission to bring the Gospel to all men and women of good will, to baptize those who will greet His Good News of Salvation, becoming new children of God, heir to His Kingdom; to renew without bloodshed the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus through the ages; thus repeating continuously the Eternal and Perfect Sacrifice, Pure Oblation to the Almighty Father, that reconciled God with humanity through Redemption.

It is the priest that forgives sins in “persona Christi”, that is, Christ himself forgives our sins through His priests, who in His name act, obeying His command: “To whom you forgive their sins, they will be forgiven...” At the moment of sickness, the priest will impose his consecrated hands over the sick to implore Christ’s strength over them, consoling their hearts and nurturing their souls. And those who possess the plenitude of priesthood, the bishops of the Catholic, Apostolic Church in communion with the See of Peter, confirm the flock in Faith, activating the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in their souls so as to become mature Christians, preparing them for their calls in life, either to Holy Matrimony, between a man and a woman, portraying the relationship of Christ with his holy spouse, the Church, an image of love and caring between spouses, culminating in the birth of new children of God that will be redeemed by His grace and mercy; or to the vocation of priesthood and consecrated life! It is the spirituality of the priesthood that we will address in this article.

1. “Alter Christus”

The Catholic priesthood was instituted at the Holy Last Supper by Christ himself who wanted to perpetuate His mission on earth till the end of times. The disciples were molded in the image of Jesus Christ through the three years of apprenticeship that they had with their Master and Savior. They were finally molded in His image through the period of prayer around the Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, who accompanied them at the cenacle in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit! It was in Pentecost that the Church was born through the effusion of the Holy Ghost and the maternal prayer of the Heart of the Mother, who molded her new spiritual children into the image of her First Born, Jesus Christ.

The sacrament of Ordination, or Holy Orders, by the imposition of hands of the successors of the Apostles, the bishops of the Catholic Church, in communion with Peter (the Holy Father, Bishop of Rome), imprints forever an indelible character upon the candidate to the priesthood (whose formation may have taken eight years or so of

academic studies, pastoral experiences, formation in a particular spirituality of the different “families” –orders, congregations, institutes or diocesan- in the Universal Church, living in community at the seminar, passing psychological tests to prevent future deviations of the right path and contemplating in prayer the mystery of God). This character imprinted in his soul is to make him into Christ’s image. It was Christ himself who called his disciples, all men, to the priesthood. There were many other followers, especially very holy women, beginning with His own Mother, living closer to God than the Apostles themselves. But they were not called by Christ to the priesthood. The Church have always respected this decision from its Master and have preserved the priesthood to men.

This may not be understood by the secular world, but we should see it through the eyes of Faith.

The Catholic priest must conform himself with Christ: Divine gifts and favors put to the service of the Christian community and to humanity, invoking God’s name in the vows or pledge, in his prayer and response to God’s desires, in the administration of the sacraments, in the celebration of the liturgical feasts, prayer of the Church or breviary and the Eucharist, culmination of his life and center of his spirituality; the witnessing of the Gospel and the preaching of the word of God; his abstinence, penance and fasting offered for poor sinners, distinguish the priesthood as a wonderful adventure to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Grace and Mercy are bestowed upon the priests to make them able to carry on the Cross of Christ as good Samaritans who assist their Savior in the great mission of salvation and cure of souls.

2. Christ has triumphed over the secular world.

But this is not an easy life. Only through Grace, Mercy and personal collaboration with God’s plans can the priest be faithful to His Master. This is not an easy task. Today, when the secular world “offers” so many materialistic rewards, it is very difficult to maintain the necessary spiritual balance to persevere in this lifestyle where “you are in the world but you are not part of the world.” But the priest knows this and was prepared for this during his years of formation. As a human being, he is fragile and weak, but nurtured by the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the priest has no fear, because Christ has conquered the world already!

Many good vocations have been lost when the human frailty abandon the life of prayer and penance for the “songs of a sea-nymph”, that is, the attractions of the secular world. The priests must keep focused on their following of the footsteps of Jesus Christ: Christ perfect love or charity! In this way, the priests will give to all the value it has in the hierarchy of values established by God, the order of creatures and their values, according to the Creator. The priest should love what it worthy of his love, loving accordingly as Christ loves, in his own measure. The tranquility of order, the peace of Christ, is the great reward for knowing how to love! And this reward is much superior to anything in the world.

3. Interior Life

Priests must devote sufficient time to prayer and meditation. Interior life is more important than what can be externally observed. It is through the prayer of contemplation of the mystery of God (that prayer which Our Lady taught to the three little shepherds of Fatima through a light coming from Her Immaculate Heart, “that light which was God himself”) that priests can keep the pace with Christ’s footsteps. Lay people should understand that priests are called to a special life. Professions and positions held by priests are secondary, for their unique call is to be “other Christs.” No priest should ever confuse his true vocation with other worldly affairs, even with positions inside the hierarchy of the Church that may bring them to administer power and possessions. Be careful or you may lose your true vocation. You must see yourself in the eyes of Christ to see if you fit into His image! This is possible through a great grace granted by Our Lady as she granted it to the three little children of Fatima, who contemplated themselves in that light coming out of Her Immaculate Heart, that light which was God himself, “and in that light they could see themselves as in the best of mirrors”, understanding their conscience in depth, learning what God asked of them, knowing themselves much better, discovering their inner self.

4. True devotion to Mary

To follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ it is best to walk by the hand of the Blessed Mother of Christ who knows better than anyone else how to follow Him. True devotion to Mary is a sign of predestination. We are destined for heaven. Priests will continue their ministry forever in eternity, by sharing in the only priesthood, that of Jesus Christ, who offers Himself eternally to the Almighty Father in a pure oblation that redeemed mankind. The Most Holy Trinity, God himself, is a family composed of three different persons sharing the same divine nature: The Father is the Creator of all things; the Son is the alpha and omega, the Wisdom and Word through which all things were created by the Father: the Holy Ghost is the perfect love that unites the Father and the Son, by whom God works and manifests. The priests will continue in eternity sharing with Jesus Christ in offering the eternal sacrifice God deserves and this alone and by itself is worthy of all sufferings and trials a person may have in his earthly life.

5. Conclusion

The Spirituality of the Priesthood is that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, because they, more than anyone else, portray that beautiful Kingdom of God, the Reign of the Two Hearts, that will symbol the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil, a triumph promised in God’s Revelation.

Thanks be to God there are lay people who have “a priestly soul” for they are capable of offering themselves to God to share in Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of souls. These lay people may share and help priests in the fulfillment of their mission.

They will never be ordained priests and will never have the “imprint of an indelible character” in their souls. But, they will share in the prayers and penance, the mission and works of priests, consoling them, helping them, assisting them in their carrying of Christ’s Cross. Lay people should treasure their priests, pray for them and offer penance for them, for they will be perfect in Christ’s eyes and they will stand up immediately when they have the misfortune of falling. The world is fragile. Handle it with prayer and

penance! Count your blessings and do not judge others as you do not want yourself to be judged!