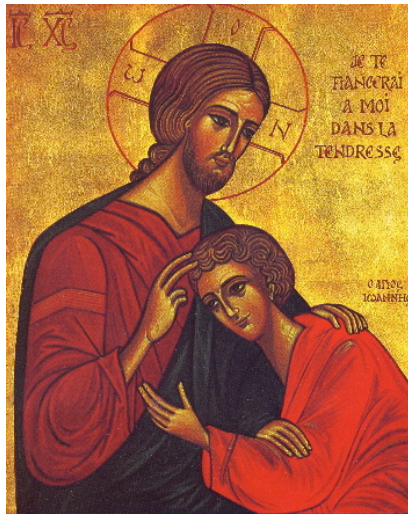


The Being (Greek rendition of YHWH) Exodus 3:14
ho ôn

Jesus
Christ



'I will betroth
you
to myself
in tenderness'
(Hosea 2:20)

Saint
John

1

David Walker

'We are experiencing a new understanding of the church and the role of ministry within it, as well as a re-evaluation of the role of the laity within the church, which is causing us to reflect further on their relationship to the ordained minister. Today, holiness is not seen as demanding separation from the world, but as able to be lived to the full in any Christian way of life; it is identified more with the baptismal life of the believer than with any post-baptismal vocation.'

2

David Walker (continued)

'Part of this new approach to holiness is a new understanding of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the temporal. All of these movements are motivating us to re-evaluate the meaning of ordained ministry, its role in the community, and the spirituality that is to be associated with it.'

3

John O'Donoghue

'The landscape has shattered and the old maps no longer offer guidance or direction.'

'There is no point in priests clinging desperately to their particular ledge of conviction as the ocean of different consciousness rises all about them.'

4

While it is essential that we alter our way of exercising the priesthood in a changing and more collaborative Church, it is important to reaffirm that the identity of the priest, as expressed in the writings of the early centuries down through the documents of the Vatican Council and since, has remained substantially the same. It is important to reassert this as we seek new ways of carrying out our ministry.

5

To think of ourselves as standing apart from the world, to fail to believe in the world, is to fail to believe in people. This is to fail to believe in God who is present loving the world and drawing everyone to Himself in order that

'all will be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth'(1 Timothy 2:4)

7

John Thornhill SM

- enormous task of implementing Vatican II
- The pre-Vatican Church strongly reactionary in character saw itself as separated from the world excessively institutionalised theologically and pastorally rigid paid little attention to the sources of vitality found in the Scriptures, the Sacramental Mysteries, and the wealth of experience found in Tradition.

6

Every person is made from love and for love. Everyone is called to enjoy divine communion and everyone has a word to say and a spirit to share. Yes, there is darkness and sin and dysfunction and there is need for conversion,

but Cardinal Joseph Bernardin reminds us:

'The Incarnation means that nothing of our humanity is alien to God or untouched by divine power ... All of our human experience becomes in principle a route of access to the divine.'

8

Bernardin

‘We are not dispensable “functionaries” in the church; we are bridges to the very mystery of God and healers of the soul.

When we claim this identity unapologetically, we not only find ourselves; we also provide the church and our culture with the sustenance they require.

This is the vocation, the reality, to which we are called.

It is not dependent on numbers, or structures, or chancery offices, or any of the things we thought so essential, so important, but are now completely changed or are no more.

9

Bernardin (continued)

‘Rather, it is dependent on the Lord Jesus, who never changes, and to whom we are irrevocably united through ordination –

the Lord Jesus

(who is the mystery of God and the healer of the soul)

whom we make present in a tangible and inviting way each day to the countless people whom we serve.’

10

John Thornhill SM

‘The church’s institutional structures exist to promote what is paramount in the church’s life: helping people find a life-giving relationship with God. Pastors who make this their overriding priority, consciously directing the pastoral guidance they exercise within their communities to this end, and sharing the truth of their own faith journey with their people, will find that their people respond positively.

11

John Thornhill SM

Pastors, on the other hand, whose vision is little more than administering a well-disciplined system, will find that their well-intentioned efforts often meet with dissatisfaction – as their people instinctively recognise that, before all else, membership of the church should develop their life-giving relationship with God.’

12

Karl Rahner SJ

‘The priest can bring life to the preaching of the Gospel only if (as well as and as far as it is granted to him) he is a mystagogue of that ultimate, internal, religious experience of God and his grace, without which no one can in the long run resist the pressure of his secularised environment and remain a Christian. (Without this the pastor will be little more than) a cultic and ecclesiastical official celebrating no longer credible ceremonies.

13

Karl Rahner SJ (continued)

The ability to pray ought not to be seen as a sectoral occupation in his life but as a basic structure of his existence, since he is the very one who ought always to accept, as dependent on it, the presence of the absolute mystery facing everyone, and truly to live it in freedom. The priest today is primarily the servant of the faith of others.’

14

John Thornhill SM

‘In taking up this challenge, we should weigh carefully Rahner’s parenthesis, ‘as well as and as far as it is granted to him’. Our ministry will be fruitful, if we sincerely offer the service of which we are capable. As we have already remarked, those pastors who effectively foster the faith, hope and love which constitutes the essential covenant-relationship between God and the church, and who help their people find God in the reality of their lives, are accepted by their people as effective spiritual leaders, whatever limitations they may have in their own talents.’

15

For all the changes that we are experiencing, our key ministry as priests is the same as when we were ordained:

Through us Jesus has chosen to teach, to sanctify and to govern the community placed in our care.

In ‘I will give you shepherds’, John-Paul II speaks of the ‘threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity’(n.26).

16

I will give you shepherds (John-Paul II), n.15

‘In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ the head and shepherd:

- authoritatively proclaiming his word,
- repeating his acts of forgiveness and offer of salvation, particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist
- showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit.’

17

It is Jesus’ love that alone can make this possible, and nothing can separate us from his love unless we choose to separate ourselves from him.

This precious time of retreat is a time for us, personally and as a brotherhood of priests, to fix our eyes on Jesus.

As Teresa of Avila reminds us:

‘Keep your eyes fixed on him.
He never takes his eyes off you.’

18

Whatever joys we are now experiencing in our ministry, we know that they are a privileged sharing in the joy of the Heart of Jesus.

Whatever difficulties or disappointments we are having, we know that they are a privileged sharing in his cross.

So let us accept his invitation to come aside for a short while and rest (Mark 6:31). Rest in his company.

Enjoy in prayer a quality of communion with him that will draw us nearer to his heart and that will enlighten and sustain us when we return to our current ministry and life.

19

Gregory the Great has a warning that we would recognise:

‘We shall never be in a position to correct the lives of others as long as we neglect our own.

We are wrapped up in the cares of this world, and the more we seem to busy ourselves with external affairs the more spiritually insensitive we become.’

20

Pope John-Paul II speaks of the ‘spiritual life that grows through the exercise of the ministry’(PDV n.25), and Tony Philpot uses the image of a car battery which charges itself up when the car is running. Our ministry is about communion. We come to others from our communion with God and Jesus draws them into deeper communion through our ministry.

21

Dominic spoke of our vocation: ‘contemplata tradere’
(to hand on what we have received in contemplation).

Ignatius of Loyola used a similar expression:
‘in actione contemplativus’
(contemplative in action).

In prayer we are drawn deeper into communion with God. It is from this communion that we are sent into mission.

22

John O’Donoghue

‘The priest is drawn to the frontiers ...
where divinity suffuses humanity.

In order to attend to these frontiers,
the priest must be alive to the depth and complexity
of his own interiority.’

23

In this time apart we have an opportunity
to reflect on Paul’s words:

1 Timothy 4:14

‘Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you
by prophetic utterance when the council of the elders
laid their hands upon you.’

2 Timothy 1:6

‘I remind you to rekindle the gift of God
that is within you
through the laying on of my hands;
for God did not give us a spirit of temerity,
but a spirit of power and love and self control.’

24

Vatican II Lumen Gentium n.41

‘The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one ... Each one however according to his or her own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith which arouses hope and works through love ... Priests partake of their grace and office through Christ the eternal and only mediator. They should grow in the love of God and of their neighbour by the daily exercise of their duty, should keep the bond of priestly fellowship, should abound in every spiritual good and bear living witness of God to all ...

Vatican II Lumen Gentium n.41

They have a duty to pray and offer sacrifice for their people and for the whole people of God, appreciating what they do and imitating what they touch with their hands. Rather than be held back by perils and hardships in their apostolic labours, they should rise to greater holiness, nourishing and fostering their action with an overflowing contemplation for the delight of the entire church of God.’