

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

Individual ordained ministers belong to a 'sacramental brotherhood'(PO, n. 8) of the ordained presbyterate, and are consecrated and minister as members of that 'brotherhood.'

3

The Sacrament of Orders

Some members of the Body of Christ are chosen to receive the Sacrament of Orders. As baptized Christians they continue to share in the priestly-prophetic-kingly life and ministry of Jesus as outlined in the previous meditation.

The sacrament of orders bestows on certain baptized members of the church a special grace and a special 'character' that make them instruments of Christ as head of his Body, the Church.

2

Lumen Gentium n. 28

'Christ, whom the Father hallowed and sent into the world has, through his apostles, made their successors the bishops sharers in his consecration and mission; and these in their turn duly entrusted in varying degrees members of the church with the office of ministry. Thus the divinely instituted office of ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who have from ancient times been called bishops, presbyters and deacons.'

4

This statement intentionally left open the complex historical question of the origin of the three ministries of bishop, presbyter and deacon, and was content to remind us of their ancient standing. In declaring that the office of ministry is of divine institution, no equivalent claim is being made of the ways in which this ministry has found historical expression.

5

Among the many gifts poured out on the community by Christ, Paul speaks of those that are central to the founding and maintaining of the Church as the Body of Christ:

‘The gifts that he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’(Ephesians 4:11-12).

6

‘Pastors and teachers’ remain in the community once formed to guide, instruct, nurture, protect, conserve and build it up. Those exercising organisational leadership have the responsibility of unifying and coordinating the various gifts and ministries of the members of the community for the better functioning of the body.

7

As church order developed, the task of organisational leadership fell to the bishops, assisted by presbyters and deacons. The bishops are successors of the apostles, not individually, but by being constituted members of the episcopal body (CD, n.4). This body carries on certain aspects of the apostolic ministry. Presbyters, to a lesser degree, share in this.

Note: ‘This does not imply the transmission of the extraordinary power of the apostles to their successors’. What is said of the apostles can be applied to bishops and presbyters only with necessary adjustments.

8

1. The ordained minister : sacrament of Christ the shepherd-king.

The evidence of the New Testament and historical studies of the first and second centuries of the Christian era indicate that Christian communities were, from the beginning, structured and organised in a variety of ways. However, influenced by the organisation of the Roman state and by the needs of the times, some time in the second century the system of mono-episcopacy emerged as the universal pattern of government.

9

The members of the Christian community who receive the sacrament of Orders are consecrated by a special grace to be in the Church a sacrament of Christ precisely as Head of the Body. When Paul speaks of the Christian community as the body of Christ, he is focusing on the profound truth that the life of the community is an expression of Jesus' own Spirit. Christ is the head of the body because he is its inspirer. He wills to draw everyone to himself (John 12:32) in order that we may 'live and live to the full' (John 10:10), by sharing in the communion of love which he has in God.

11

According to this system, the local Christian community was under the leadership of one bishop who was assisted by a number of presbyters and deacons.

This system still prevails in the Catholic Church in communion with Rome, in the various Orthodox churches, and in a number of other Christian churches.

10

He also shares with his disciples his mission and the power to carry it out, for God wants 'everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4). The ordained ministers are a sacrament of Christ-as-Head, incarnating in their ministry the grace with which Christ the head of the body inspires and directs it.

An ordained minister, while sharing membership in the Body of Christ with his brothers and sisters, is consecrated in a special relationship to Christ: he is a sacrament of Christ who, as head, mediates between God and the community.

12

Organisational leadership – leadership in the ‘ordering’ of the community. Of course, with this ministry as with all the other ministries, the one entrusted with it carries it out best when he does so in love. We refer back to the earlier meditation in which we outlined the characteristics of Jesus’ exercise of the role of Shepherd-King in his life and ministry, culminating in his self-giving on the cross. The ordained minister is to carry out his ministry of leadership of the community with the mind and heart of Jesus, as a service to Christ’s Body the Church.

13

The ordained minister is to help make the faithful aware of their role, as baptized Christians, to be sacraments of Christ the King, allowing the Spirit of the risen Christ to inspire them to contribute to bringing about the reign of God in the world.

14

2. The ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the prophet.

The gift of prophecy cannot be institutionalised. God can choose to speak his surprising word through anyone, including those ordained.

The special grace of the ordained is in relation to the priestly role as preacher and teacher, of which more in the following reflection.

15

3. The ordained minister as a sacrament of Christ the Priest.

The organisational leadership of the presbyter derived from Jewish synagogue practice in which the local community was under the leadership of a group of older men, the presbyters. Though the English word ‘priest’ derives from the word ‘presbyter’, the Jewish presbyter (Hebrew: zâkên; Greek: presbyteros; Latin presbyter) was not a priest (Hebrew: kohên; Greek: hiereus; Latin: sacerdos). By the third century, however, Christian presbyters, as well as the overseers of the community, the ‘bishops’, were being referred to as priests.

16

In what way does Jesus the priest mediate grace through those whom he calls to exercise organisational leadership in the Church? In what way is their priesthood 'special'(AA, n. 6)? In what way is it 'essentially different'(LG, n. 2) from other ways in which Jesus' mediatory priesthood is exercised, while being essentially linked to the priesthood of the baptised?

'Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another. Each in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ'(Vatican II LG 10).

17

Christ speaks his word to the community through the ordained minister, the sacrament of his presence as Head of the Assembly that is his Body. God's word is communicated by preaching and teaching which reveal who God is and who we are in communion with God. The self-revelation by God is to draw us into the loving communion in which holiness consists. Since the initiator of life is God, the first function of ordained minister is to mediate God's word.

19

In *The Priest and the Third Christian Millennium* (1999), the Congregation for the Clergy writes:

'From a pastoral perspective, the primary action of evangelisation is logically considered to be preaching'(p. 18).

18

We read in the First Epistle to Timothy: 'Let the presbyters who lead well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching'(1 Timothy 5:17).

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts the community: 'Remember those leading you, those who spoke to you God's word'(Hebrews 13:7).

20

In the documents of the Vatican Council we read:
‘Since nobody can be saved who has not first believed, it is the first task of presbyters to preach the Gospel of God to all’(PO, n. 4).

‘Their ministration ... begins with the announcement of the gospel’(PO, n.2).

21

When an ordained minister mediates God’s word to a community, he is doing so precisely as a sacrament of Christ-as-Head. He must speak from the communion with God that he experiences and into which he invites them. People are hungering and thirsting to know the mystery of God and to be drawn into the sacred.

In the words of the late Cardinal Bernardin, they are ‘Bearers of the Mystery’.

22

It is vitally important that they ‘preach with authority’, connecting people with God, the author of revelation.

Bernardin writes: ‘we are meant to lure the believers onto healthy spiritual ground’. We are inviting them into the sanctuary. The ordained minister should know the tradition and be able to communicate it in public in an engaging way. The following definition of the magisterium is a reminder that orthodox teaching is teaching that remains in touch with the Spirit in people’s lives:

23

John Thornhill SM

‘The expression of the gift of the Spirit, whereby the Church’s pastors serve the community of believers by discerning what the Spirit is saying to the whole Church, calling it to a witness and life which is a faithful expression of the unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of human history.’

24

It is not enough for the ordained minister to be, in the words of John Thornhill, 'a dedicated and unselfish administrator of a remarkable organisation'.

He is called to be a spiritual guide to discipleship. The demise of the Catholic sub-culture requires that he find words to connect with people who are living in the midst of the world with its 'joys and hopes, its grief and anxiety'(GS n.1).

25

We are not reinforcing a sub-culture; we are nourishing disciples with a mission, 'equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:12).

The invitation to meet people on their own pad in the secular city is an invitation to discover God there and to be an instrument of God's loving compassion there where people are.

26

We need to be exploring real questions, not repeating abstractions that fail to connect. We need to check that the people find our words worth listening to. If we find that we do not have this gift, it is our responsibility as leaders of the community to find someone who has it.

We need to be careful not to neglect certain parish bodies while we concentrate on others and we must avoid using fear as a tool, limiting people's freedom as an instrument of control. We are sacraments of a liberating God.

27

The word coming from the risen Christ, besides revealing who God is and how God has chosen to relate to us, is also a word that guides us as to how we should respond.

This directing word also is mediated to the Christian community especially through those who are ordained to leadership of that community. The leadership exercised by the ordained minister relates to the Body as such and is a sacrament of the leadership of the Body exercised by Christ the Head. The ordained minister is a sacrament of Christ directing the community to do God's will.

28

This role includes the mediation of commanding, discerning, directing and governing. Various dimension of this role are highlighted in the following texts from the New Testament:

‘This is how one should regard us, as personal servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God’(1Corinthians 4:1).

29

‘The Lord’s slave must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, able to teach, forbearing, correcting with gentleness those who oppose the truth. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth’(2Timothy 2:24-26).

‘Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock will follow’(1Peter 5:3).

‘Obey your leaders and be submissive, for they are vigilant for your souls, as ones who will have to give account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighs’(Hebrews.13:17).

30

‘The hierarchy make wise laws in docile response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit [and exercise a] supervisory and protective authority’(LG, n. 45).

‘The pastor’s task extends to the formation of a genuine Christian community’(PO, n. 6).

‘It is for the pastors to pass judgment on the authenticity and good use of the gifts of the faithful, not, certainly, with a view to quenching the Spirit, but to testing everything and keeping what is good’(AA, n. 3. See also LG, n. 12).

31

‘The holders of office ... are dedicated to promoting the interest of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the people of God may, through their free and well-ordered efforts towards a common goal, attain to salvation’(LG, n. 18).

‘While testing the spirits if they be of God, they must discover with faith, recognise with joy, and foster with diligence, the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity ... bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody may feel a stranger in the Christian community ... (They are to be) defenders of the common good’(PO, n.9).

32

John-Paul II Reconciliation and Penance in the mission of the Church today (1984):

‘The sacrament of Orders is intended to give to the Church pastors who, besides being teachers and guides, are called to be witnesses and workers for unity, builders of the family of God, and builders and preservers of the communion of this family against the sources of division and dispersion’(n.27).

33

The ordained priest, as a sacrament of Christ directing the community to do God’s will, should be one who is able to facilitate the cooperative building of a community of inter-dependent people. He needs to respect people and their gifts. He should be able to foster their contribution to the building of the community and to contributing towards its mission in and to the world. He will need to be sufficiently integrated to be able to focus upon others without his own agenda dominating, and have the ability to listen and to relate to people in an attractive and liberating way.

34

The power to command is dangerous when exercised by one who has not learned to obey.

Teresa of Avila represents every Christian teacher when she writes: ‘In perfect conformity to God’s will lies all our good’(Interior Castle, II,1,8). Doing God’s will means ‘seeking him with all our hearts’. God does not want us to obey blindly or automatically, without engaging our heart.

35

God does not command from the outside as it were. God speaks also to our heart and he wants our obedience to come from our heart. This is what we mean by conscience: an attentive listening to the movements of our heart that are inspired by God. If we are attentive to our heart and listen to the directions of God that are picked up by our conscience, and if we humbly and faithfully respond to these inspirations from our heart, we are promised a special blessedness.

36