

### Priest, Mediator of God's Word

The communication of God's word is the first movement of the mediation of the priest.

Hebrews 1:1-3

'By various stages and in various ways in times of old GOD speaking to the Fathers in the prophets with the end of those days spoke to us in a SON, whom he established heir of all through whom also he made the ages who, being the shining-forth of his glory and the expression of his reality, and continuing to carry all things [to their goal] with his utterance of power involving himself in effecting purification from sins, took his seat to the right of the Majesty on high.'

1

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews goes on to establish that Jesus is a 'trustworthy high priest'(Hebrews 2:17). We can be confident that the word which he speaks comes to us from God.

Moses was trustworthy (Numbers 12:6-8).

How much more so is Jesus (Hebrews 3:1-6).

2

• The section devoted to God's word concludes with the following hymn:

'The word of God is living, active,  
sharper than any two-edged sword,  
piercing until it divides  
soul from spirit,  
joints from marrow;  
it is able to judge the thoughts  
and intentions of the heart.

There is no creature that is hidden from God;  
all is laid bare before God.

The word faces us towards God.'(Hebrews 4:12-13)

3

An ordained priest, because he shares in the priesthood of Christ is called to be a sacrament of Christ's priestly mediation of God's word.

'The carrying out of the priest's ministry begins with the announcement of the gospel'(Vatican II PO 2).

'Since no one can be saved who has not first believed, it is the first task of the priest to preach the gospel of God to all'(Vatican II PO 4).

4

Catechism 890

‘The pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates.’



Athanasius      Chrysostom  
Ambrose            Augustine

5

‘By the sacrament of Order, presbyters are configured to Christ the priest as servants of the Head. They must be prepared to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ who gives them life and guidance’(PO n. 12).

- When an ordained priest mediates God’s word to an individual or group or community in his role as priest, he doing so precisely as a sacrament of Christ-as-Head.

6

- The secular priest speaks to people from his experience of the reality of their lives. If he is to connect them with God, he must speak from the communion with God which he experiences and into which he invites them.

- People are hungry and thirsting to know the mystery of God and to be drawn into the sacred. In the words of the late Cardinal Bernardin, we are ‘Bearers of the Mystery’.

7

It is vitally important that we ‘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 priest 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.

8

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.’

9

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. 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.

11

It is not enough for the priest 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 of the priest 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’(G&S n.1).

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).

10

The priest as a sacrament of Christ  
mediating God’s will by governing

An ordained priest, because he shares in the priesthood of Christ is called to be a sacrament of Christ’s priestly mediation of God’s will.

• leading • directing • governing • shepherding

‘The bishops have the ministry of discernment and harmony, which involves an abundance of special gifts of the Holy Spirit and the distinctive charisms of ordering the various roles in intimate docility of mind to the one and only life-giving Spirit.’

(Mutual Relations between bishops and religious 1978).

12

‘In what is doubtful, freedom; in what is necessary, unity; in all things, charity’(John-Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance 1984 n.9)

‘The sacrament of Orders is intended to give to the Church the 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’(John-Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance 1984 n.27)

13

‘They are to be dedicated to promoting the interests of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the People of God, through their free and well-ordered efforts towards a common goal, may attain to salvation.’

(Vatican II LG 18)

‘The pastor’s task extends to the formation of a genuine Christian community’(Vatican II PO 6)

‘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 people ... bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody feels a stranger in the Christian community’(Vatican II PO 9)

14

Vatican II PO 12

‘Priests must be prepared to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ who gives them life and guidance.’

Vatican II LG 12

‘Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and the proper use of the gifts through their office, “not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and to hold fast to what is good.’

15

An ordained priest is called to be a sacrament of Christ’s priestly mediation drawing the community into communion with God.

He is called, therefore, to live a life of self-offering (‘sacrifice’) and to encourage the same in the community

‘Acting in the person of Christ, the priest unites himself most intimately with Christ’s offering, placing on the altar his entire life, which bears the marks of a holocaust’(Paul VI Priestly Celibacy 1967 n. 29).

16

‘The Christian spiritual tradition regards the sacred heart of Jesus, which draws priestly hearts to itself, as a profound, mysterious synthesis of the Father’s infinite mercy’(The priest in the third millenium page 51).