

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

The Ordained Minister as the sacrament of
Christ the priest in his self-offering,
drawing his Body the Church
into communion with his Father

The Epistle to the Hebrews, and indeed the whole of the New
Testament, makes it clear that the sacrifice which Jesus offered
to God was the sacrifice of himself.

2

The gift of oneself

'Through his own blood, he entered the sanctuary once for all, having
secured an eternal redemption'(Hebrews 9:12).

'Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age,
according to the will of our God and Father'(Galatians 1:4).

'The Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many'(Mark 10:45 = Matthew 20:28).

'God our saviour desires everyone to be saved and to come to the
knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator
between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a
ransom for all'(1 Timothy 2:4-5).

3

'The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all ...
Jesus Christ ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to
purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good
deeds'(Titus 2:11-14).

'The Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for
me'(Galatians 2:20).

'Christ loved the church, and delivered himself up for her'(Ephesians 5:25).

'I lay down my life for my sheep ... The Father loves me because I lay
down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but
I lay it down of my own accord (John 10:15-18).

'No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's
friends'(John 15:13).

'This is my body which is for you'(1 Corinthians 12:24).

4

God's word besides revealing God as love is also an invitation for people to offer themselves in loving response and so enter more deeply into communion with God.

Christ the priest is the mediator who receives our self-offering and draws us into his intimate love-communion with the Father in the Spirit.

The ordained priest is a sacrament of Christ in this mediatory role, which he carries out especially in the liturgy:

5

'Priests are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful, as well as to celebrate divine worship, as true priests of the new covenant'(LG, n.28).

'Christ calls priests to lead your holy people in love, to nourish them by your word, and to strengthen them through the sacraments'(from the Preface of the Chrism Mass).

Ordained ministers are 'Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God'(1Corinthians 4:1).

Pope Paul VI expresses well the demands which priestly ministry makes of those called to it:

'Acting in the person of Christ, the priest unites himself most intimately with the offering, and places on the altar his entire life, which bears the marks of the holocaust.'

6

Paul of Tarsus writes:

'Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all'(Phil 2:17).

The ordained minister is a sacrament of Christ the sanctifier who makes the community holy. He should, therefore, be one who is able to lead in prayer. He should also be one who is aware of the mystery of God and so of the continuing surprise and creative energy of the divine as incarnated in people.

If John can say of all who want to see God: 'All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure'(1John 3:3), a special purity is asked of the one who is graced to be for the community a sacrament of Christ the mediator.

7

In exercising his ministry as a priest, the presbyter is a sacrament of Christ the priest.

Like Christ the priest, he must dwell in the sanctuary.

In other words, he must live in communion with God for he is to speak God's words and draw others through his priestly mediation into this communion.

8

Vatican II On the Priesthood PO 3

‘The priests of the New Testament are, by their vocation to ordination, set apart in some way in the midst of the People of God. But this is not so that they should be separated from the people or from anyone, but that they should be completely consecrated for the task for which God chooses them. They could not be the servants of Christ unless they were witnesses and dispensers of a life other than that of this earth. Yet they would be powerless to serve others if they were to remain aloof from their life and circumstances.

9

Vatican II On the Priesthood PO 3

Their ministry makes a special claim on them not to conform themselves to this world. At the same time it requires of them that they should live among people in this world and that as good shepherds they should know their sheep, and should also seek to lead back those who do not belong to this fold so that they, too, may hear the voice of Christ and there may be one fold and one shepherd.’

- separated from sin
- separated for mission

10

He will need to open his heart to the risen Christ and receive a share in Jesus’ compassion.

In the Gospels many scenes remind us of how deeply moved Jesus was by the suffering of others.

We think of Jesus and the leper (Mark 1:40-45);

of his response to the needy crowd (Mark 6:34);

and of his feeling for the widow of Nain (Luke 7:15).

Compassion features also in the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20).

11

When speaking of the kind of perfection which God enjoys and so the kind of perfection which is to be our goal, Luke speaks of compassion, using a word which in the Greek versions of the Old Testament is used to translate the Hebrew word that is related to the word for the womb. God feels for us the way a mother feels for the child in her womb:

‘Be compassionate, just as your Father is
compassionate’ (Luke 6:36).

12

1Thessalonians 2:7-12

‘Though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ we were gentle among you, like a mother feeding and cherishing her own children. Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

For, my brothers and sisters, you remember our labour and toil; we worked night and day that we might not burden any of you while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and so is God, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers; for you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.’

13

‘My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you’(Galatians 4:19).

‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering in doing good, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and control of self’(Galatians 5:22-23).

‘To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some’(1Corinthians 9:22).

‘He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’. I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak then I am strong’(2Corinthians 12:9-10).

14

Colossians 3:11-15

‘Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freedman, but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, feelings of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and long suffering in doing good.

Bear with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgive one another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you too must forgive. And over all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.’

15

The ordained minister is to help make the faithful aware of their role, as baptized Christians, to be sacraments of Christ the Priest, allowing the Spirit of the risen Christ to inspire them to contribute to consecrating the world, drawing others into communion with God, by their holy lives, and by the gift of themselves in love.

16

Canon 1008 of 1983 Code of Canon Law

‘By divine institution some among the Christian faithful are constituted sacred ministers through the sacrament of orders by means of the indelible character with which they are marked; accordingly they are consecrated and deputed to shepherd the people of God, each in accord with his own grade of orders, by fulfilling in the person of Christ the head the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing.’

17

‘The ordained are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful, as well as to celebrate divine worship, as true priests of the new covenant’(LG, n.28).

Students for the ordained priesthood should be ‘trained for the ministry of the word ... for the ministry of worship and sanctification ... for the ministry of the shepherd’(OT, n.4).

18

Pope John-Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation ‘I will give you shepherds’ speaks of:

‘the priest’s threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity’(n.26).

‘Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd - authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock’(n.15).

‘Christ calls priests to lead your holy people in love, to nourish them by your word, and to strengthen them through the sacraments’(n.15, from the Preface of the Chrism Mass).

19

Sacramental Consecration to Christ

While it is correct to define the ordained priesthood in terms of ministry (LG, n. 18; PO, n. 2), it is essential to remember that no ministry in the Church can be reduced to a way of relating among the members of the Christian community. All ministry, including that of the ordained priest, comes from Christ. It is a grace that flows from a special consecration to him.

Who the ordained priest becomes through the consecration of ordination is the source of what he is able to do. It is because of who the ordained priest is graced to be by Christ that he is missioned to do what he does.

20

‘Through the sacrament presbyters, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head’(PO, n.2).

‘The priest, by virtue of the consecration which he receives in the sacrament of Orders, is sent forth by the Father in the mediatorship of Jesus Christ to whom he is configured in a special way as head and shepherd of his people, in order to live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit, in service of the Church and for the salvation of the world’(PDV, n.12).

21

‘Priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd’(PDV n.15).

‘In the Church’s tradition, the ordained ministry is referred to as “sacrament”[Catechism n.875], since through this ministry those sent by Christ, by God’s gift, effect and offer that which they themselves can neither effect nor give ... The minister of Christ does not substitute for him but relies on him and allows him to act in and through him’(The Priest and the Third Christian Millenium, 1999, page 52,53).

This special sacramental consecration to Christ is the ultimate source of the priest’s confidence:

‘No one should be discouraged, as we are doing God’s work. The God who calls us is the same God who sends us and who remains with us every day of our lives’(PDV, n.4).

22

It is appropriate that something as fundamental as our dependence on Christ should find sacramental expression in the Church. This is the place of the sacrament of Orders. The ordained minister is a sacrament in the Church of Christ the Shepherd-King, the Prophet, and the Priest in relation to his body, the Church.

Just as Jesus carried out his ministry as Shepherd-King, Prophet and Priest through his total gift of himself, so it is to be for the ordained minister who is called and graced to be for the Church a sacramental sign of the presence in their midst of Jesus, the Shepherd-King, the Prophet and the Priest.

23