

‘Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the teacher, priest and king’(Vatican II PO 1)

The ministry of the ordained priest is one of the ministries of leadership in the Christian community. His leadership is of the community as such, being a sacrament of Christ the Head to his Body.

- Teaching • Divine worship • Governance
- A ministry of mediating the word of Christ to the community as such. (Baptised persons mediate Christ’s word, one to another, but not as Christ the Head to the Body).

1

- A ministry of mediating Christ’s governing of the community as such, with a view to the unity of its life and mission. (Baptised persons share in some form of Christ’s leadership, but not as Christ the Head to the Body).

- A ministry of mediating the self-offering of the community as such to God. (Baptised persons mediate one another’s self-offering to God, but not that of the Body itself).

2

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

3

#### Priest – Consecrated in Love

John speaks of our intimate communion with God in terms of the Indwelling of the Spirit, of Jesus himself and of the Father. Jesus promises:

‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ... You know the Spirit, because the Spirit abides with you, and the Spirit will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you ... You will see me; because I live, you also will live ... Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’(14:16-23).

4

Addressing the soul, John of the Cross writes:

‘O most beautiful of creatures, transcendent spirit, who long to know where your Beloved is and where you may find and be united with the One you love. Your Beloved dwells within you. You are yourself God’s tabernacle, God’s secret hiding place. Rejoice, exult, for all you could possibly desire, all your heart’s longing is so close, so intimate as to be within you; you cannot be without God’ (Spiritual Canticle 1,7).

5

Sacramental consecration of a priest 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 which 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.

6

PO n.2).

‘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.’

7

‘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).

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

8

'In the Church's tradition, the ordained ministry is referred to as "sacrament" [Catechism n. 875], since 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 Millennium, 1999, page 52,53)

'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).

9

We are called to love God 'with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'(Mark 12:30, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5).

While the journey of prayer encompasses every dimension of our lives, the interior dimension is the key: the inner journey to our own heart and so to the Heart of God: the journey of prayer in which Heart speaks to heart.

10

Teresa speaks of prayer as: 'intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with the One who we know loves us'(Life 8.5). 'Look at Him', she writes, 'He never takes his eyes off you.'(Way 26.3).

John of the Cross reminds us that 'the language which God hears best is silent love'(Maxims on Love 53).

11