

03. Sharing in Christ's priestly mission





There is only one **priest** in the Christian Religion: Christ. It is he who draws people into the sanctuary of God's presence. Now he, the vine, acts through us his branches.

In baptism we were anointed **priest**.

Jesus, our One and Only Priest

In the Christian Church there is only one priest, Jesus, 'the one mediator between God and humankind'(1 Timothy 2:5).

The church is a priestly community.

We are 'a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, God's own people'(1Peter 2:9).

'Jesus made us to be a kingdom, **priests** serving his God and Father'(Revelation 1:6).

Luke 22:19-20

Jesus took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave



‘The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak’(St Ambrose) (EG, n.47).

Mark 6:35-38

When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.”

But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.”

They say to him, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?”

And he says to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.”

When they had found out, they say, “Five, and two fish.”

Mark 6:39-44

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties (see Exodus 18:21).

Taking the five loaves and the two fish,

he looked up to heaven, and blessed

and broke the loaves,

and gave them to his disciples to set before the people.

And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Mark 14:22

Taking a loaf of bread,

and blessing,

he broke it,

gave it to them, and said,

“Take; this is my body.”

Luke 22:14-15

When the hour came Jesus took his place at table, and his apostles with him. He said to them: I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'

John 13:1

Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

John 13:5

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and wiped them with the towel he had wrapped round his waste.



Sieger Köder

John 13:21-23

One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved –
was reclining next to him.



Jesus' Farewell Speech (John 13:33 - 14:31)

- Modelled on Moses' Testament in Deuteronomy

13:34-35

I give you a new commandment,
that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also
should love one another.

By this everyone will know
that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.

John 14:1-3

Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God, believe also in me.
In my Father's house
there are many dwelling places.
If it were not so, would I have told you
that I go to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come again and will take you to myself,
so that where I am, there you may be also.



John 14:7-9

If you know me, you will know my Father also.

From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father,
and we will be satisfied.'

Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time,
Philip, and you still do not know me?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

'It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known'(John 1:18).

'It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2Corinthians 4:6).

14:15-18, 23

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate,
to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world
cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, because he abides with you,
and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you ...

If you love me you will keep my word,
and my Father will love you, and we will come to you
and make our home in you.



PRIEST

SANCTUARY

Presence to God

**Action
towards
US**

**Action
towards
GOD**

WORD

MEDIATION

**SACRI
FICE**

God's Way

US

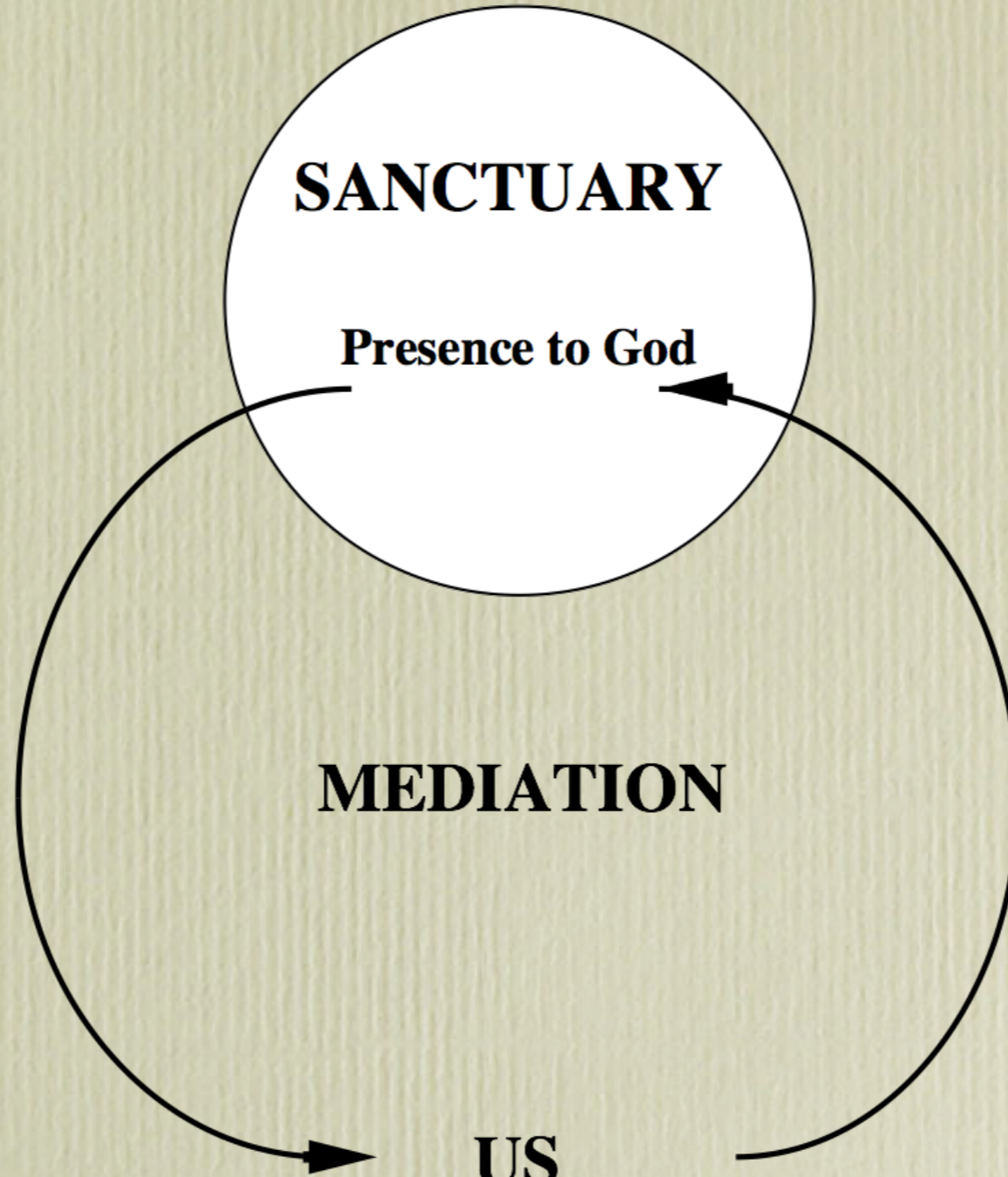
Self-offering

Will

Prayer

Blessing

forgiveness



Ordained Priests

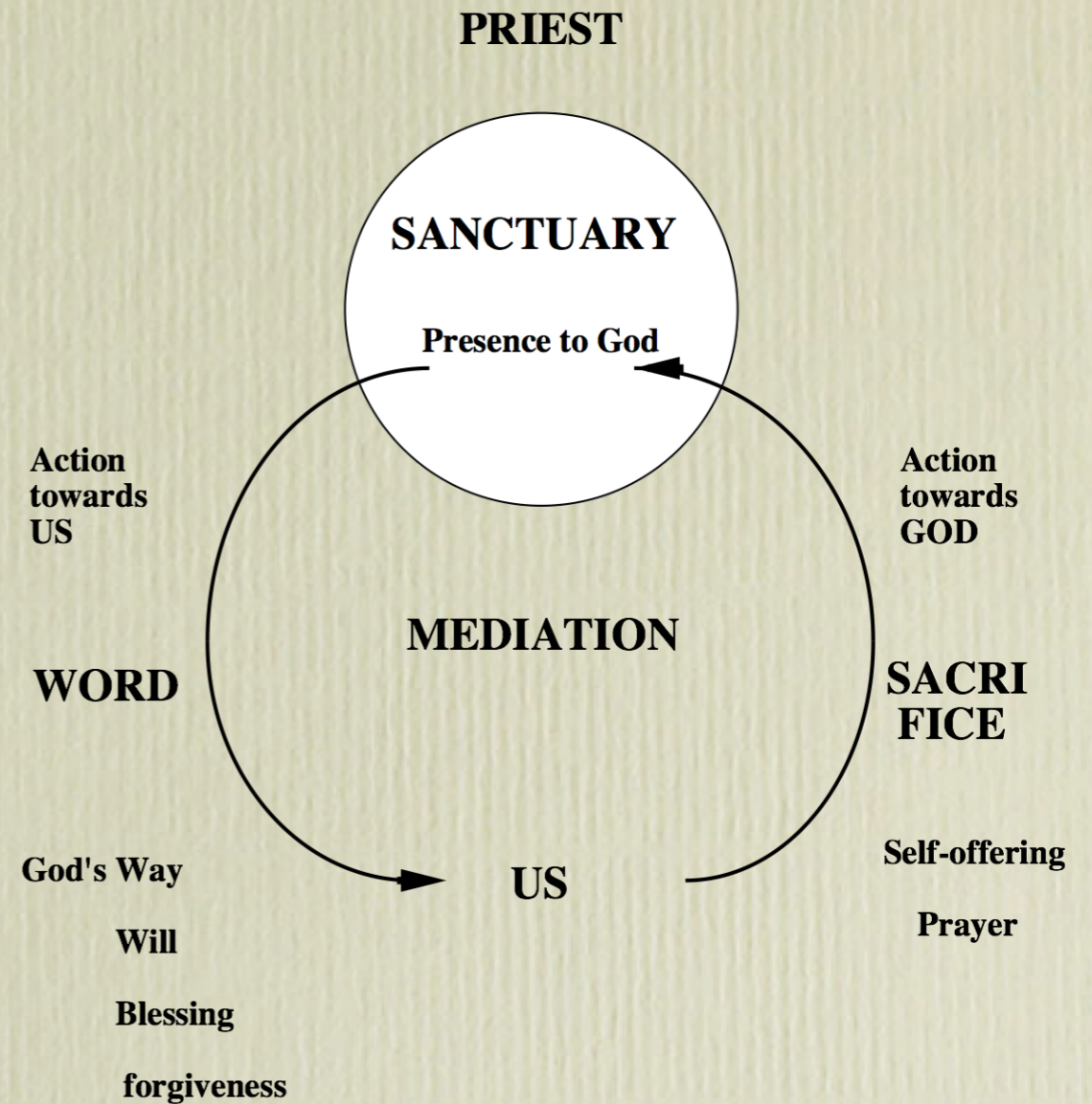
‘Through the sacrament presbyters, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are signed with a special **character** and so are **configured to Christ the priest** in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head’(PO, n.2).

‘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).

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.



- Avery Dulles offers four models of the ordained ministerial priesthood. Each of the four is clearly relevant. You might find, however, that you instinctively relate to one of them more than to the others.
- How do you see the priesthood within the church's life and ministry? How do you see yourself, with your unique gifts and calling ('You have not chosen me, I have chosen you'), within the ministry of priests in the Church and in the world? How does your story fit into the long story of the priesthood?

The priest as

1. a minister of the Word (see Romans 15:14-16)
2. a cultic figure ordained to administer the Sacraments
3. a pastoral leader of a community of disciples
4. an icon of Christ

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.

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.

To him be honour and glory, now and always.'

Karl Rahner SJ (quoted by Thornhill, page 13)

‘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. 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.’

‘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.’

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’(Philippians 2:17).

Paul speaks of ‘the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.’(Romans 15:15-16).

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.

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).

'God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus'(Philippians 1:8).

Philippians 2:1-5

‘If then there is any appeal in Christ,
any consolation from love,
any communion in the Spirit,
any movements of compassion and feelings of love,
make my joy complete:
be of the same mind, having the same love,
being of one soul and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition.

Do not strive after or seek to find your value
in things that are worthless,

but in humility regard others above yourselves,
so that not everyone is focused on themselves,
but each is looking to the interests of others.

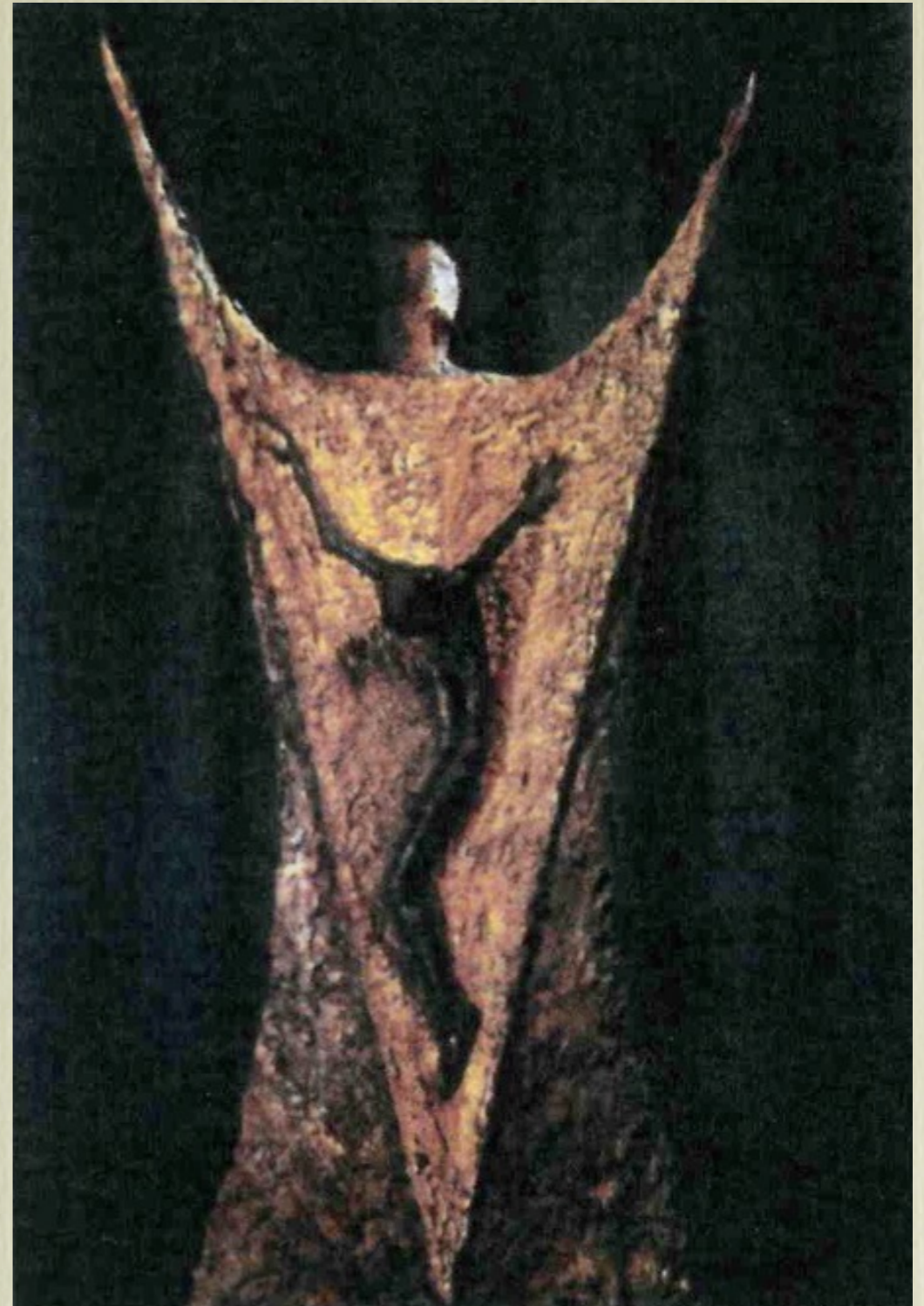
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.’

Philippians 2:6-9

‘Being in the form of God,
Jesus did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself and became
obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God highly exalted him.’



2Corinthians 3:18



‘All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.’

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

‘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).

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.

‘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 Millennium, 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).

All the elements of priestly mediation find special expression in the Eucharist in which the priest is a sacrament of Christ the bridegroom who speaks God's word of love to his bride, invites the assembled community to respond in love, and welcomes it into divine communion.

'The ministry of ordained priests is directed to the Eucharist and finds its consummation in it. For their ministrations, which begins with the announcement of the Gospel, draws its force and power from the sacrifice of Christ and tends to this'(PO n. 2).

‘It is in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice that priests fulfil their principal function’(PO n. 13).

‘Pastoral charity flows especially from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This sacrifice is therefore the centre and root of the whole life of the ordained priest, so that the priestly soul strives to make its own what is enacted on the altar of sacrifice’(PO n. 14).

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.

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

1Timothy 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.’

2Timothy 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.’

‘I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).(EG, n. 49).

‘Secular’ Priesthood: Holiness through belonging

A special strength of the secular priest is precisely that he is in the world. He knows it. His experience informs his insights which in turn contribute to pastoral decisions that are informed by his belonging to people in their everyday lives. This ‘unspectacular matter-of-factness’(Tony Philpot), this ‘street-wise’ quality of his ministry and life is the seed-bed for special redemptive love.

‘In our times, as always in the Church, heralds of the Gospel are needed who are expert in humanity, profoundly knowing the heart of contemporary man, who share his joys and hopes, his fears and sorrows, and at the same time who are contemplatives, in love with God’(Congregation for the Clergy: Priest in the third millennium.)



Everything is holy now Peter Mayer



When I was a boy each week on Sunday we would go to church



and pay attention to the priest as he would read the holy word
and consecrate the holy bread.

And everyone would kneel and bow.



Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now



Everything, everything

Everything is holy now.



And when I was in Sunday school, we would learn about the time
Moses split the sea in two; Jesus made the water wine.
And I remember feeling sad that miracles don't happen still.



But now
I can't keep track
'cause everything's
a miracle.



Everything, everything, everything's a miracle.



Wine from water
is not so small,
but an even better
magic trick is that
anything is here at all.

So the challenging thing
becomes
not to look for miracles,
but finding where
there isn't one.

When holy water was rare at best, it barely wet my fingertips.

But now I have to hold my breath, like a swimming in a sea of it





It used to be
a world half there,
heaven's second rate
hand-me-down.

But I walk it with
a reverend air
'cause everything
is holy now.





Read a
questioning
child's face,

and say it's
not a
testament.

That'd be
very hard
to say.



See another new morning come, and say it's not a sacrament.
I tell you that it can't be done.



This morning,
outside I stood,
and saw a little
red-winged bird,
shining like
a burning bush,
singing like a
scripture verse.

It made me want
to bow my head.



remember when church let out. How things have changed since then.
Everything is holy now



It used to be
a world half there,
heaven's second rate
hand-me-down.

But I walk it with
a reverend air
'cause everything
is holy now.