

o4. The Prophetic Ministry as lived by the Ordained



The Sacrament of Orders

Some members of the Body of Christ are chosen to receive the Sacrament of Orders. As baptised Christians they continue to share in the priestly-prophetic-kingly life and ministry of Jesus. As Ordained Ministers they have a special way of living their baptismal consecration.

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.

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).

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.’

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).

The **apostles** are those who have seen the Lord (Acts 1:22; 1Corinthians 9:1) and who have received a personal commission from him (Galatians 1:1,12).

The **prophets** are those who receive revelation from the Spirit concerning the mysteries of God and are commissioned to communicate this revelation to the community. Their gift lies outside the organisational structure of the community, for 'the Spirit breathes where he wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes' (John 3:8).

The ministries of apostle and prophet are foundational to the Church (Ephesians 5:20).

Paul speaks also of ‘**evangelists**’. Having learned the Gospel from the apostles, these in their turn go out as missionaries and preach the word to others.

‘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.

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.

I. Proclaiming the Good News

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).

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

‘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).

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.

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).

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, ordained ministers are 'Bearers of the Mystery'.

Hebrews 4:12-13

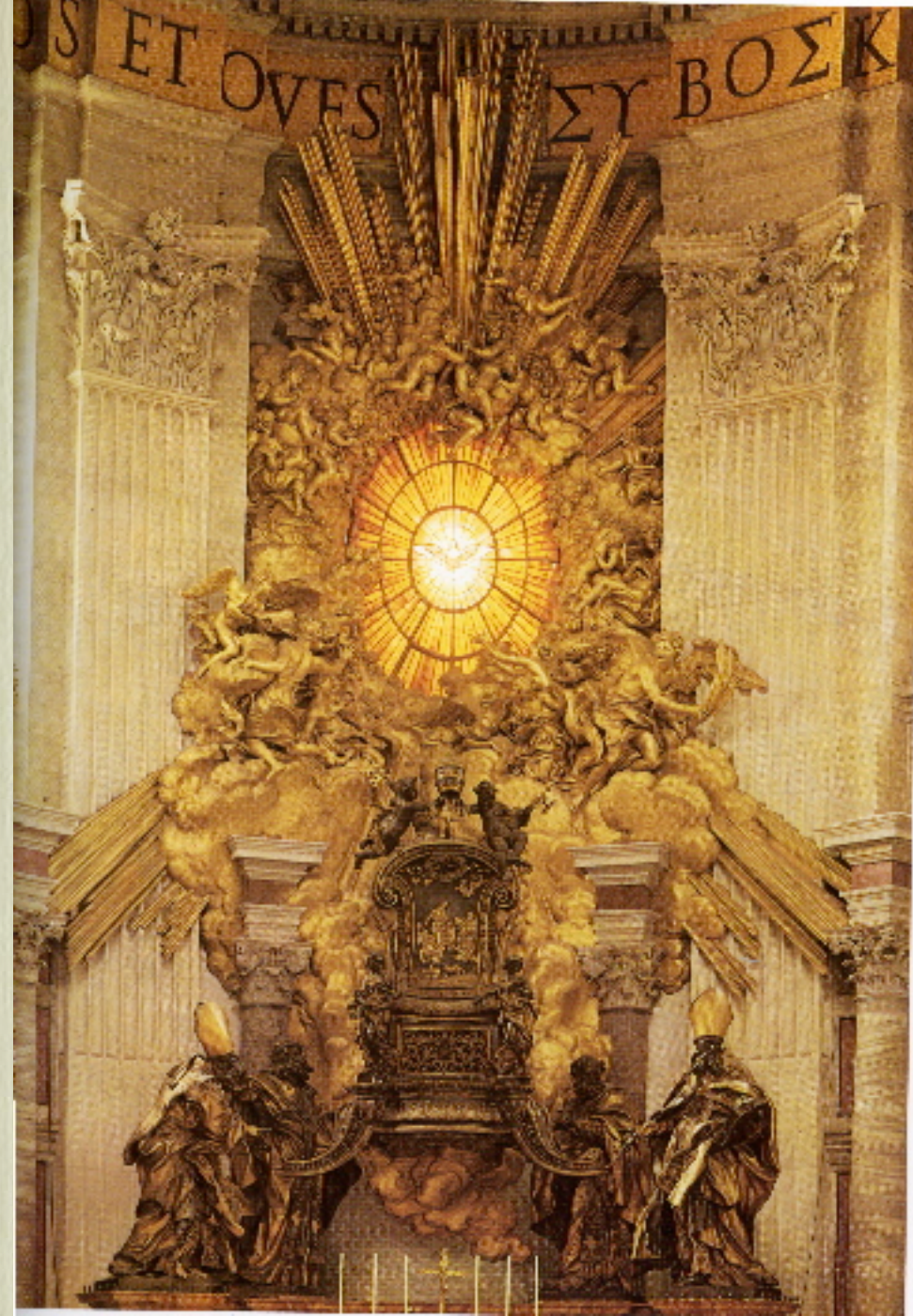
‘The word of God is living, active,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
piercing until it divides
soul from spirit,
joints from marrow;
it is able to judge the thoughts
and intentions of the heart.

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

The word faces us towards God.’

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
Ambrose
Chrysostom
Augustine

- The Ordained Minister 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 hungering and thirsting to know the mystery of God and to be drawn into the sacred. We are 'Bearers of the Mystery'.

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.

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.’

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).

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.

The following warnings from the prophets could provide a good examination of conscience for those of us who are are commissioned to be heralds of the Word.

‘Listen to the words I say ... Open your mouth and eat what I am about to give you ... Then go and speak’ (Ezekiel 2:8 and 3:1).

‘The priests teach whatever they please and my people love it’ (Jeremiah 5:31).

‘Prophet no less than priest, all practise fraud. They dress my people’s wound without concern. Peace! Peace! they say, but there is no peace’ (Jeremiah 6:3).

‘You have seduced me, Yahweh, and I have let myself be seduced; you have overpowered me: you were the stronger. I am a laughing-stock, everybody’s butt ...The word of Yahweh has meant for me insult, derision, all day long. I used to say ‘I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more.’ Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not bear it’ (Jeremiah 20:7-9).

‘Do not listen to what the prophets say, they are deluding you. They retail visions of their own, and not what comes from the mouth of Yahweh’ (Jeremiah 23:16).

‘I have not sent them, yet they are running; I have not spoken to them, yet they are prophesying’ (Jeremiah 23:21).

‘Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream as his own! And let him who receives a word from me deliver it accurately! ... Does not my word burn like a fire? Is it not like a hammer shattering a rock?’ (Jeremiah 23:28-29).

‘I never sent them or commissioned them, and they serve no good purpose for this people’ (Jeremiah 23:32).

‘Watch over my word to see it fulfilled’ (Jeremiah 1:12).

‘The priests have never asked: “Where is Yahweh?”
(Jeremiah 2:8).

‘My people have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, only to dig cisterns for themselves, leaky cisterns that hold no water’ (Jeremiah 2:13).

‘The shepherds are the ones who have been stupid: they have not searched for Yahweh’ (Jeremiah 10:21).

You shepherds have let my flock be scattered and go wandering and have not taken care of them’ (Jeremiah 23:2).

‘Say to those who make up prophecies out of their own heads: The Lord Yahweh says, ‘Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, without seeing anything! Like jackals in a ruin, so are your prophets, Israel. They have never ventured into the breach; they have never bothered to fortify the House of Israel, to stand fast in battle. They have empty visions and give lying prophecies and say: “It is Yahweh who speaks,” although Yahweh has not sent them ... Instead of my people rebuilding the wall, these men come and slap on plaster’ (Ezekiel 13:1-6,10).

‘The leader is like a sentry: his function is to keep watch and to warn of approaching danger’ (Ezekiel 2:16-21).

‘Trouble for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves. Shepherds ought to feed their flock, yet you have fed on milk, you have dressed yourselves in wool, you have sacrificed the fattest sheep, but failed to feed the flock. You have failed to make weak sheep strong, or to care for the sick ones, or bandage the wounded ones. You have failed to bring back strays or look after the lost ... My flock has been scattered all over the country; no one bothers about them, and no one looks for them’ (Ezekiel 34:1-6).



All You Need To Know

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I was here right with you never did I leave you.
I was your strength, your peace of mind,
all you hoped that you could be.
And Oh perhaps it's hard for you to grasp or understand
All you need to know for now is I was always there.



I was there right with you never did I leave you.

You trusted me to be for you
the song of courage you were needing.

And though the mystery is hard for you to grasp or understand

All you need to know for now is I was always there.



I will be with you for always, you will have nothing to fear.

I will love you protect you and keep you.

I was there right with you never did I leave you.

You have my word I promise you that you will never be alone.

And though perhaps it's hard for you to grasp or understand

All you need to know for now is I was always there.



All you ever need to know is
I am always there.

