

**OUR PRIESTHOOD:
A DIVINE MYSTERY OF LOVE.**

My dear friends in Christ, I will begin with a story Mgr D'Ercole told me some years ago. When he was a seminarian, he and some other seminarians met Pope St Paul VI and asked him to give them his blessing. The Pope asked them "Do you want to be priests?" They said, "Yes, Holy Father, please give us your blessing. Pope Paul asked again, "Do you really want be priests?" "Yes, Holy Father," They answered. The holy Father asked them a third time, "Do you want to be priests? I think they probably felt like St Peter on the side of the Lake of Galilee. Pope St Paul then said, "Today, the Church does not need many priests, the Church does not need good priests, the Church needs holy priests.

The Marian Movement and especially the consecration to the Heart of Mary, is surely the safest way to priestly holiness for us.

In this meditation I wish to speak about our priesthood as a mystery of divine love. I do so from two points of view.

A. Firstly, I look at priesthood from the angle of Scripture and theology.

B. Then I see what the messages say about it. The entire book speaks of our priesthood, but I wish to meditate only on those thirteen beautiful messages on priesthood Our Mother give us for each Holy Thursday from 1986 to 1997. I focus on the central calls of Our Lady in these messages. We find that there is a wonderful harmony between Scripture, Tradition and Our Mother's messages. (307, 322, 348, 377, 399, 421, 444, 469, 490, 515, 451, 568, 590).

After a cenacle once in Minnesota an older man came to me and told me he was a priest. He had a crisis and got permission to leave the priesthood. He married but his wife had died. Then he said, "I read the Blue Book and got back a great desire for my priesthood, but the bishop will not take me back." I encouraged him to persevere in his consecration. Some years later, I was back there, and, to my joy, he was concelebrating. The bishop accepted him back on May 13. He died a few years ago in the Old Priests Home in St Paul, I asked him how he had been able to accept the book, Priests sometimes have intellectual difficulties with it. His answer was interesting, "I checked the *Imprimatur* and saw that it was given by Archbishop James J. Byrne of Dubuque. Archbishop Byrne was my dogma teacher at the St Paul Seminary in the Twin Cities, and I knew that if anything got his approval it was perfectly OK."

I. Priesthood.

There is only one priest, according to the New Testament, and that is Jesus. But we share his priesthood. It is the letter to the Hebrews that identifies Jesus as a priest. I find Vanhoye's

writings most helpful when teaching Hebrews. Technically, Jesus was a Jewish layman not a priest because he did not belong to the tribe of Levi but Judah. His priesthood is that 'of Melchizedek.'

The OT is full of priests. Their task was "to offer gifts and sacrifices" (Heb 8:3). They fulfilled this task conscientiously by sacrificing animals in the Temple of Jerusalem. Hebrews points out that this was only a foreshadowing of what was to come. These sacrifices did not manage to change hearts or remove sin. The sacrifice that destroys sin and establishes the New Covenant is that of Jesus. But what Jesus offers is himself, an existential sacrifice. He is the true High Priest who offers himself in sacrifice. He is both priest and victim.

Jesus exercises his priesthood by offering this sacrifice of himself. But what does he offer? Heb 5:8 says "He learnt obedience through what he suffered." Jesus took on what Paul calls "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:5). He took on sinful human nature and had to bring it into subjection to God's will. He took on that hard human heart that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had noted and made it a heart that became love alone. We often presume Jesus had it easy but we must take his agony seriously. "He learnt obedience through suffering" (Heb 5:8). Mark shows this in the Gethsemane scene, Luke says that his sweat became blood. Finally, he can say, "Not my will but yours, be done." The heart of Jesus is now a heart that lives by the divine love alone, Luke's "Father forgive them..." shows this also. Through his passion, the heart of Jesus became the new heart, a heart that can truly enter into a selfless relationship with God, a heart that

loves through all his sufferings. This heart, this relationship of love, is this new heart that Jesus sacrifices. This is what he offers to the Father and gives to us in the new Covenant.

A The Priesthood of the Bride, our baptismal priesthood

The New Covenant is also described as a marriage, that between the risen Christ and us believers. Jesus creates and gives his wife and bride this new heart, his new reality that enables us all to have access to God, to relate directly to God as God's adopted children. Through baptism Jesus shares his priesthood with all of us. We too can now offer ourselves in sacrifice to God as Jesus did and in union with him. Vat II reminds us that all our "work, prayers... daily life...become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. During the celebration of the Eucharist, these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body" (LG 34).

Here we see the priestly activity of all. we are given the Holy Spirit to bring about our sanctification and to help us in our daily struggle to let go of our selfishness and do God's will alone. This is the essential, the most important participation in Christ's priesthood. Since we all share Christ's priesthood through baptism, why is another sacrament of priesthood needed? The Reformation got rid of it.

B The Ministerial Priesthood

Why another Sacrament of Priesthood? Why Holy Orders? My answer may appear strange: I want to speak of the *lonely wife*. I used this image at my Jubilee celebration to help people to understand the priesthood. Christ, the bridegroom has

ascended to Heaven. The Church, his wife and bride is here on earth. Therefore, we are faced with the problem of an absent husband. Yes, it is true, the Church, his spouse, has his Holy Word in the Scriptures. Through these and through the preaching, Christ is close to us. But, to use a most inadequate image, it is like the wife has the husband only on the phone. She has his presence through the word. She can talk to him and hear him. Still a marriage that depends solely on phone contact is not an ideal marriage. This wife is a lonely wife.

Here is where Christ's infinite wisdom and love in creating another sacrament comes into play. He has made a sacrament that brings his very self, his real presence, to his wife, the Church: the sacrament of Holy Orders. Jesus chooses men to represent and make present his nuptial presence as bridegroom to his beloved wife. By baptism priests bring people into the full reality of becoming part of the wife and bride of Christ. When the wife denies her husband, they restore her to his presence through "the keys of the blood" as St Catherine of Siena describes the sacrament of reconciliation.

Centrally, they make his presence a reality through the Eucharist. We call the consecrated bread and wine, the real presence because that is what it is, Christ is really present for his wife. She is truly united to him through communion. Who could have imagined such a thing? Priests make his sacrifice, carried out once for all on the cross, a present reality for his beloved wife. She is enabled to unite her existential sacrifice (Rom 12:1) with his so that through him and with him and in him, united to him through the Holy Spirit, she can give all honor and glory to the Father. In communion, the wife receives the very "body of

Christ.” The task of the ordained is keep the new covenant alive, to make this marriage a true reality of love, the loving presence of Christ and his love to his church, his bride who loves him in return. I have this against you” Jesus says to his spouse in Rev 2:4. “You have abandoned your first love,” the love for Christ himself. Even the priest himself is an icon, one that makes Christ, the bridegroom, and his love, present wherever he goes.

The sacrament of Holy Orders, then, is an extraordinary measure of love instituted by Jesus himself, to ensure his loving presence with his beloved wife and bride until the end of time. Mother Teresa calls priests, “The sunshine of God’s love.” St John Vianney says, “The priest continues the work of redemption on earth... If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die, not of fright but of love... The priesthood is the love of the heart of Christ (CCC 1589).

II The Mystery of the Priesthood in “To The Priests.”

The Holy Thursday messages remind us that this is the day on which Jesus instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood (the Fifth Mystery of Light!). Our Mother gives us advice on how to live as faithful priests (469, '92). The essential thing for us is to live our consecration fully and then we can be the priests that Jesus desires. We look at three important themes that shine through these Holy Thursday messages. With these she shows us, in her own motherly way, how to live our priesthood in the fulness of love.

1 Gethsemane.

Our Lady reminds us that after instituting the Eucharist and the priesthood at the last supper, Jesus went to Gethsemane and immediately plunged into his most painful agony. She asked us to accompany him, in our souls, in his agony. It is this union with the agony of Jesus, Mary tells us, that makes us “salt” and “light.” Five locutions take up this topic (307, '85; 348, '87; 444, '91; 541, '94; 568, '95). In this space, I can only mention some of the highlights of these messages.

In this Passover of Love that Jesus celebrated “the new and eternal Covenant between God and humanity us established, and the rite of the *new Passover* in the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world is instituted. Beloved sons, accept with gratitude this great gift of the love of Jesus, who has associated you intimately in his supreme and eternal Priesthood” (541,g April 13, 1995). Throughout his entire life, Jesus looked forward to celebrating this Passover. “I have ardently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” (Lk 22:15). Through our consecration, Our Mother now invites us all “into the Gethsemane of my Immaculate Heart,” 541k). In his agony, Jesus received no consolation from the Apostles. Mary now invites us to enter with Jesus into Gethsemane. It is only by entering into Jesus’ agony that “we purify and sanctify yourselves at the very source of your priesthood. Only in this way do you become the precious salt to make wholesome many poisoned foods. Only in this way can you become lights enkindled on a lampstand... “, (348 g).

As many, even his ministers, flee from Jesus today, the Church is undergoing a new agony. “You, O little sons, formed in the Immaculate Heart of your heavenly Mother must, like the Apostle John, keep watch in prayer and in trust during the painful hours of this new Holy Thursday” 307 j).

Our Lady reminds us that “the Father sent Him the angel with the chalice of his comfort” and that today “My Immaculate Heart is the chalice of comfort, which I want to offer to the Church.” She adds, “I want to make of you today the Chalice of comfort .. for Jesus, for the Church, for the Pope, for this poor humanity... (568 g l).

And when the agony weighs us down, she reminds us “Do not seek human consolation or superficial comforts. It is my Motherly task to give you that chalice of comfort which the Heavenly Father has prepared for you (444,o).

Padre Pio was surely among the most wonderful examples of priests who lived the agony of Jesus in body and soul, in our times, and became salt and light for the whole world

2 Love

At the Chrism Mass on every Holy Thursday, we promise to love Jesus who has called us to share his eternal priesthood and to love those souls entrusted to us. In the Holy Thursday locutions, Our Mother reminds us of the extraordinary and intimate love Jesus has for each of us and of how we must let ourselves be possessed by his love to be faithful priests.

a. Jesus' love for us.

“Having loved his own, he loved then to the end” (Jn 13:1). Our Lady reminds us that Jesus loved us “to the summit of every possibility of love,” sacrificing himself for us on Calvary. Through the Eucharist and the tabernacle, he remains with us to the end of time.

Thus, Our Lady asks us to make the Mass, “the summit of your priestly day” and to go “often before the Tabernacle.” (421 i,k,j)

“How much Jesus loves you. Let yourselves be possessed by his love.” Jesus calls us his friends (Jn 15:15).

In a moving passage, Our Lady advises us “Do not look at your miseries; do not be discouraged by your weaknesses: do not count your sins; do not go back over your infidelities; but let yourself be possessed by his love, because the divine charity of the Heart of Jesus surpasses infinitely every human ingratitude” (515 d,k). If we allow ourselves to be possessed by his divine love, we too can set all our people “afire with inextinguishable charity.” (322c).

b. Our Priestly Love.

Jesus asks of us only to be loved.

Never before as today has love been so unloved.

We are first called to love Jesus and then to love and be of service to others especially those in most need of our love (490 c,d,f,h).

Mary promises to lead us into the cenacle of his divine love where we will learn his love and how to serve others (590 d,i).

United with Jesus we will find that Jesus comes to the world through us, through our words, actions, the sacraments we celebrate especially those of reconciliation and the Eucharist (322 c-f)

The Eucharist: Where love grows.

It is especially before the Tabernacle, that Jesus forms us into a deep intimacy with himself. Our Lady insists on this constantly. We must be the Saint Johns of the Eucharistic Jesus she says. She will lead us into a habitual intimacy of life with Jesus in the Eucharist and it is her maternal will that the Eucharist finds in our churches his royal palace where our hearts can be completely immersed in his Eucharistic Heart (377). "In fact, the coming of the glorious reign of Christ will coincide with the greatest splendor of his Eucharistic reign among you" (421 m). We priests must prepare the Church of this coming Eucharistic reign of Jesus. I especially recommend for your immediate meditation the messages of 1988 and 1994.

I finish with some words from Mother Teresa- whose sisters always welcomed Fr Gobbi and the Marian Movement.

"There is nowhere on earth, where we are more welcome than before the blessed Sacrament.

There is nowhere on earth where we are more loved, than before the Blessed Sacrament."

Praised be Jesus Christ.



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