

FAITH & CULTURE SERIES

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

The Priesthood - Baptized and Ordained Sister Esther Mary Nickel R.S.M., Ph.D., S.L.D.

1. The wonder of the gift of life

- a. Our life is given to us as a pure gift of love from our God, and together we make our pilgrimage to eternal life.
- b. Because of the incarnation of Christ we not only have our natural lives, but we have the possibility of living a joy-filled life that shines from the supernatural grace of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Each of us has the possibility of a grace-filled relationship with God through the sacraments. We participate in this life through the Sacrament of Baptism.

2. The Priesthood of Christ

- a. God the Father sent his Son Jesus to humbly serve us as our Priest, our one mediator with the Father.
- b. As a priest he offered his complete sacrifice by obediently accepting death, death on a cross.
- c. He gave his life for us and shows us how we are to give our lives in service to one another – this is the gift of the priesthood.

3. Baptismal Priesthood

- a. We are invited through the Sacrament of Baptism to be united with Jesus so that we may also live eternally in Heaven with the Blessed Trinity and the angels and saints. We receive an indelible mark or seal that signifies our participation in the Mystical Body of Christ.
- b. Prayer from the Rite of Baptism: "As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life."
 - Our anointing as priests commits us to prayer and participation in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.
 - Our anointing as prophets enables us to participate in the prophetic mission of Christ by proclaiming who God is and following his will for us in our lives.
 - Through anointing into the kingship of Jesus, we have a true relationship with Christ and can invite others to know and love him too.

4. Fruitfulness of Baptism: Collaboration and Complementarity of Vocations

- a. Our baptismal vocation is to holiness of life.
- b. In the Church's liturgy we are given prayer formularies that confirm the path of the person and beg for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - The prayer of consecration for religious profession.
 - The Nuptial Blessing of the Sacrament of Matrimony.
 - The rites of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: Diaconate and Episcopal Ordination.
- c. Each specific vocation that is lived for the Church contributes to the transformation of the People of God into the Mystical Body of Christ.

5. Divine Worship

- a. We cannot speak about the priesthood without the worship of God.
- b. The love of Christ gathers us into one; one Mystical Body united with Christ on our pilgrimage of faith.
- c. Through the liturgy, the Church presents Herself before God. Through this presentation, all participate because all come before God.

6. The Most Holy Eucharist in the Sacrament of Charity

- a. Just as the world goes on while we sleep, so does the eternal wedding feast of the lamb continue outside of time and space, always inviting us to participate in the unbloody representation of the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus through the holy sacrifice of the Mass.
- b. Jesus wanted his love and redemption always present, so on the night before he died he gave us two gifts: the Eucharist and the Priesthood, which is necessary to make Christ present.
- c. The ministerial priest is ordained to be able to make Christ present through the sacraments. Thus the ordained priesthood is at the service of the priesthood of the baptized. He makes Christ's sacrifice present on the altar so that we can join the offering of our lives to his offering in obedience to the Father.
- d. The Sacrament of Holy Orders unites the man to Christ as both *Sacerdos et Victimae*, that is Jesus, Priest and Victim. Christ is the Eternal High Priest and every ordained priest associates himself with the priesthood of Jesus.
- e. We, by virtue of the priesthood of the baptized, participate in offering the sacrifice, and together, the ordained priest and the baptized faithful comprise the: *Totus Christus*, the whole Christ.

7. The Ordained Priesthood is Reserved for Men

- a. The ordained priesthood, which is reserved to men, serves the priesthood of the baptized.
- b. The priest represents Jesus Christ the Bridegroom of the Church.
 - Scripture declares the covenantal relationship between God and human beings as a marriage.
 - God is the bridegroom, and the people of God are the bride. Jesus is the bridegroom of the Church who offers his life on the Cross for his bride, so She can receive his life and become one with him.
- c. Jesus chose twelve men to be his apostles, whom he made his first priests when he established both the ordained priesthood and the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Jesus had great reverence for women and related to them with great freedom, he even broke cultural norms in the way he related to women. Yet, when it came to establishing his sacramental priesthood, that is those who would be empowered with the sacramental power to represent him, he chose only men.
- d. When Pope Francis affirmed that priesthood was reserved only to men in his first Apostolic Exhortation, he pointed out that there are different forms of power and the true power in the Church is the power of holiness. Pope Francis said, "The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general." (EvG 73)
- e. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, reveals the dignity of the baptismal priesthood, and by the gift of her own life she becomes the mother of the whole Church.
- f. The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the baptized. Priests exist to serve the holiness of the bride by laying down their lives.

8. Why are Priest Celibate?

- a. Jesus was celibate and said in Matthew (19:12) "yet some have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."
- b. Jesus did and does have a bride; his bride is the Church, and he came to lay down his life for his bride.

9. The Problem of Clericalism

- a. Clericalism is an abuse of the ministry of clergy and occurs whenever a cleric exercises the power of his ministry for his own good, and not for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.
- b. The priest has no right to claim spiritual authority for himself. He does have spiritual authority, but it comes only from Christ and it must be used to serve the mission of Christ.

10. Conclusion

- a. The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the Saints. How do we come saints? We need the sacraments of the Church.
- b. We pray for vocations to the ordained priesthood, men chosen from among the baptized faithful.
- c. We pray for holy families, who give us an example of the domestic Church.
- d. We pray for vocations to the consecrated life: men and women to serve one another and the Church by exercising their baptismal priesthood.