

Homily.4Advent.12.19.21  
St. Bernard Church  
Deacon Tim Sullivan

## ALL OF US ARE PRIESTS

I've got a question for you this evening.

How many priests does our parish have?

The correct answer is closer to 5,000. 5,000 priests in our parish.

How could this be true?

In tonight's Second Reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told that Jesus did away with the sacrifices of animals in Judaism as described in the Old Testament.

The passage from Hebrews also tells us that Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice and that we, His followers, are consecrated through the offering, the sacrifice, of His body. "Consecrated" means "made sacred."

The Bible and the teachings of the Church instruct us that Jesus came to earth to reveal Himself as priest, prophet and king. It's in His role as priest that Jesus offered Himself as sacrifice, because that's the primary role of a priest. A priest offers sacrifice.

So, in the Catholic Church, we have what are called "ministerial priests," the ordained priests, like Msgr. Gaalaas and Fr. Archie, who offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

But the Bible tells us that all of the baptized in the Church are priests.

In 1 Cor. 10:16, Saint Paul writes: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

Saint Peter, in 1 Peter 2:9, says about us: "But you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Finally, Saint John tells us in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 1, verses 5 and 6: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever [and ever]. Amen."

The Catechism of the Church reinforces this principle that all the faithful share in what is called the common priesthood.

871 "The Christian faithful ...since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal office in their own manner, are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church..."

872 "In virtue of their rebirth in Christ all [the Christian faithful] cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ..."

873 "In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission. To the apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing in his name and by his power. But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ..."

How do all of you function as priests? How is this supposed to work?"

The answer is that each of you is supposed to offer a sacrifice during the Mass. And that sacrifice is yourself, your trials, your challenges, your anxieties, all the difficulties in your life, no matter how big or how small.

Here's how the Catechism describes this:

CCC 1368 "The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head... **In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.**"

The bread and wine that are brought forth and placed on the altar, represent your lives. That is why the ministerial priest describes the bread using these words: "which the earth has given and human hands have made," and describes the wine as "fruit of the vine and work of human hands."

You put your lives on the altar, and then the priest prays that the Holy Spirit will come upon these gifts and make them into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. At the words of consecration, "This is my body" and "this is my blood," your lives, your sacrifices, are united with the sacrifice of Jesus and offered to the Father. And with the grace that comes from your participation in the sacrifice of Jesus, your lives are transformed.

You might recall that at every Mass, the priest says the following prayer out loud: "'Pray, brethren that my sacrifice **and yours** may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.'" And we respond: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His name, **for our good and the good of all His holy Church.**"

The ordained priest at Mass does not act as a substitute for the faithful. He acts as their representative. Your sacrifice goes through his hands, so to speak.

Here's an example. As the bread and wine are placed on the altar, you say this: "Lord, there's so much anxiety in my life. I put that anxiety on the altar as my sacrifice. I ask for the Holy Spirit to take this anxiety, unite it with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and offer it to the Father. Make it a blessing for someone in the Body of Christ who is in need."

There's more.

You are not just priests at Mass, priests when you're here in the church. You are priests when you leave, priests in what you do in your daily life.

So how does this work?

We follow, we in a sense imitate, what happens at Mass in our daily lives.

In the situations that develop in our daily lives, we ask the Holy Spirit to come upon us, to guide us and give us the grace to know and follow God's will in what happens. We ask the Holy Spirit to unite our lives to Jesus and give us the supernatural grace that flows from His sacrifice for us.

We are to live the Mass, live the Eucharist, in a conscious, intentional way as much as we can every day.

When we do this, ordinary situations are transformed into moments of grace, for us and for those we encounter.

This process is described very beautifully in the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: 'Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the *intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life* begins to take shape...Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God."

The Catechism echoes the words of Pope Benedict about how the laity live out the Eucharist in Section 901: "For all your works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Living the Eucharist is expressed more simply in Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Let's close with a short prayer.

"Jesus, our goal in life is to follow you, to live the way You did as much as we can, which is only possible with Your grace. Thank you for the privilege of sharing Your priesthood with us. Help us, through the grace of the Eucharist, to offer our lives as a sacrifice for others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we live out the meaning and purpose of our lives by uniting our trials and challenges with Yours and making them a gift to the Father. Amen."