

Theology Night

"The Eternal Priesthood"

St. Stephen Catholic Church

June 13th, 2023



Tu es sacerdos in aeternum (Heb v. 6)

Vesting Prayers for a Priest:

While washing his hands:

"Da, Domine, virtutem manibus meis ad abstergendam omnem maculam; ut sine pollutione mentis et corporis valeam tibi servire" (Give virtue to my hands, O Lord, that being cleansed from all stain I might serve you with purity of mind and body).

The Amice:

"Impone, Domine, capiti meo galeam salutis, ad expugnandos diabolicos incursus" (Place upon me, O Lord, the helmet of salvation, that I may overcome the assaults of the devil).

The Alb:

"Dealba me, Domine, et munda cor meum; ut, in sanguine Agni dealbatus, gaudis perfruar sempiternis" (Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart; that being made white in the Blood of the Lamb I may deserve an eternal reward).

The Cincture:

"Praecinge me, Domine, cingulo puritatis, et exstingue in lumbis meis humorem libidinis; ut maneat in me virtus continentiae et castitatis" (Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may abide in me).

The Maniple:

"Merere, Domine, portare manipulum fletus et doloris; ut cum exultatione recipiam mercedem laboris" (May I deserve, O Lord, to bear the maniple of weeping and sorrow in order that I may joyfully reap the reward of my labors).

The Stole:

"Redde mihi, Domine, stolam immortalitatis, quam perdi in praevaricatione primi parentis; et, quamvis indignus accedo ad tuum sacrum mysterium, merear tamen gaudium sempiternum" (Lord, restore the stole of immortality, which I lost through the collusion of our first parents, and, unworthy as I am to approach Thy sacred mysteries, may I yet gain eternal joy).

The Chasuble:

"Domine, qui dixisti: Iugum meum suave est, et onus meum leve: fac, ut istud portare sic valeam, quod consequar tuam gratiam. Amen" (O Lord, who has said, "My yoke is sweet and My burden light," grant that I may so carry it as to merit Thy grace).



The following from “Dignity and Duties of the Priest; or. Selva” by St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

Chapter I

II. Importance of the Priestly Office

The dignity of the priest is estimated from the exalted nature of his offices. Priests are chosen by God to manage on earth all his concerns and interests. “Divine,” says St. Cyril of Alexandria, “are the offices confided to priests.” St. Ambrose has called the priestly office a divine profession.” A priest is a minister destined by God to be a public ambassador of the whole Church, to honor him, and to obtain his graces for all the faithful. The entire Church cannot give to God as much honor, nor obtain so many graces, as a single priest by celebrating a single Mass; for the greatest honor that the whole Church without priests could give to God would consist in offering to him in sacrifice the lives of all men. But of what value are the lives of all men compared with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which is a sacrifice of infinite value? What are all men before God but a little dust? *As a drop of a bucket, ...as a little dust.* (Isa. xl. 15,17) They are but a mere nothing in his sight: *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.* (ibid.) Thus by the celebration of a single Mass, in which he offers Jesus Christ in sacrifice, a priest gives greater honor to the Lord, than if all men by dying for God offered to him the sacrifice of their lives. By a single Mass, he gives greater honor to God than all the angels and saints, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, have given or shall give to him; for their worship cannot be of infinite value, like that which the priest celebrating on the altar offers to God.

Moreover, in the holy Mass, the priest offers to God an adequate thanksgiving for all the graces bestowed even on the Blessed in Paradise; but such a thanksgiving all the saints together are incapable of offering to him. Hence it is, that on this account also the priestly dignity is superior even to all celestial dignities. Besides, the priest, says St. John Chrysostom, is an ambassador of the whole world, to intercede with God and to obtain graces for all creatures. The priest, according to St. Ephrem, “treats familiarly with God.” To priests every door is open.

Jesus has died to institute the priesthood. It was not necessary for the Redeemer to die in order to save the world; a drop of his blood, a single tear, or prayer, was sufficient to procure salvation for all; for such a prayer, being of infinite value, should be sufficient to save not one but a thousand worlds. But to institute the priesthood, the death of Jesus Christ has been necessary. Had he not died, where should we find the victim that the priests of the New law now offer? a victim altogether holy and immaculate, capable of giving to God an honor worthy of God. As has been already said, all the lives of men and angels are not capable of giving to God an infinite honor like that which a priest offers to him by a single Mass.

III. Grandeur of the Priestly Power.

The dignity of the priest is also estimated from the power that he has over the real and the mystic body of Jesus Christ.

With regard to the power of priests over the real body of Jesus Christ, it is of faith that when they pronounce the words of consecration the Incarnate Word has obliged himself to obey and to come into their hands under the sacramental species. We are struck with wonder when we hear that God obeyed the voice of Josue --*The Lord obeying the voice of man* (Jos. x.14)--*and made the sun stand when he said move not, O sun, towards Gabaon,...and the sun stood still* (Jos. x.12). But our wonder should be far greater when we find that in obedience to the words of his priests --*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*--God himself descends on the altar, that he comes wherever they call him, and as often as they call him, and places himself in their hands, even though they should be his enemies. And after having come, he remains, entirely at their disposal; they move him as they please, from one place to another; they may, if they wish, shut him up in the tabernacle, or expose him on the altar, or carry him outside the church; they may, if they choose, eat his flesh, and give him for the food of others. "Oh, how very great is their power," says St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of priests. "A word falls from their lips and the body of Christ is there substantially formed from the matter of bread, and the Incarnate Word descended from heaven, is found really present on the table of the altar! Never did divine goodness give such power to the angels. The angels abide by the order of God, but the priests take him in their hands, distribute him to the faithful, and partake of him as food for themselves. (pp. 26-27)

With regard to the mystic body of Christ, that is, all the faithful, the priest has the power of the keys, or the power of delivering sinners from hell, of making them worthy of paradise, and of changing them from the slaves of Satan into the children of God. And God himself is obliged to abide by the judgment of his priests, and either not to pardon or to pardon, according as they refuse or give absolution, provided the penitent is capable of it. (27)

Were the Redeemer to descend into a church, and sit in a confessional to administer the sacrament of penance, and a priest to sit in another confessional, Jesus would say over each penitent, "Ego te absolvo," the priest would likewise say over each of his penitents, "Ego te absolvo," and the penitents of each would be equally absolved. How great the honor that a king would confer on a subject whom he should empower to rescue from prison as many as he pleased! But far greater is the power that the eternal Father has given to Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ has given to his priests, to rescue from hell not only the bodies but also the souls of the faithful: "The Son," says St. John Chrysostom, "has put into the hands of the priests all judgment; for having been as it were transported into heaven,

they have received this divine prerogative. If a king gave to a mortal the power to release from prison all prisoners, all would pronounce such a one happy; but priests have received from God a far greater power, since the soul is more noble than the body." (28-29)

IV. The Dignity of the Priest Surpasses all other Created Dignities.

All the angels in heaven cannot absolve from a single sin. The angels guardian procure for the souls committed to their care grace to have recourse to a priest that he may absolve them: "Although," says St. Peter Damian, "angels may be present, they yet wait for the priest to exercise his power, but no one of them has the power of the keys--of binding and of loosening." When St. Michael comes to a dying Christian who invokes his aid, the holy archangel can chase away the devils, but he cannot free his client from their chains till a priest comes to absolve him. After having given the order of priesthood to a holy ecclesiastic, St. Francis de Sales perceived, that in going out he stopped at the door as if to give precedence to another. Being asked by the saint why he stopped, he answered that God favored him with the visible presence of his angel guardian, who before he had received priesthood always remained at his right and preceded him, but afterwards walked on his left and refused to go before him. It was in a holy contest with the angel that he stopped at the door. St. Frances of Assisi used to say, "If I saw an angel and a priest, I would bend my knee first to the priest and then to the angel." (p. 31).

Chapter II: The End of the Priesthood.

I. The Priesthood Appears to the Saints a Formidable Charge

St. Cyprian said, that all those that had the true spirit of God were, when compelled to take the order of priesthood, seized with fear and trembling, as if they saw an enormous weight placed on their shoulders, by which they were in danger of being crushed to death. (p. 39)

But how, I ask, does it happen that the saints, who live only for God, resist their ordination through a sense of unworthiness, and that some run blindly to the priesthood, and rest not until they attain it by lawful or unlawful means? Ah, unhappy men!, says St. Bernard, to be registered among the priests of God shall be for them the same as to be enrolled on the catalogue of the damned. And why? Because such persons are generally called to the priesthood, not by God, but by relatives, by interest, or ambition. Thus they enter the house of God, not through the motive that a priest should have, but through worldly motives. Behold why the faithful are abandoned, the Church dishonored, so many souls perish, and with them such priests are also damned. (40-41).

II. What is the End of the Priesthood.

God wills that all men should be saved, but not in the same way. ...Perhaps the sole ends of the priesthood are to say Mass, and to recite the Office, and then to live like seculars? No, the end for which God has instituted the priesthood has been to appoint on earth public persons to watch over the honor of his divine majesty, and to procure the salvation of souls. ...And Cornelius à Lapede says: "Just as it is the office of the angels to praise God without ceasing in heaven, so it is the office of priests to praise God without ceasing on earth.

...As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them (John xvii. 18). Thus, priests are placed in the world to make known to men God and his perfections, his justice and mercy, his commands, and to procure the respect, obedience, and love that he deserves. They are appointed to seek the lost sheep, and when necessary, to give their lives for them. This is the end for which Jesus Christ has come on earth, for which he has constituted priests: *As the Father hath sent me, I also send you.* (John xx.21)

Chapter III: The Sanctity Necessary For the Priest

I. What should be the Sanctity of the Priest by Reason of his Dignity.

Great is the dignity of the priesthood, but great also are its obligations. Priests ascend to a great height, but in their ascent they must be assisted by great virtue; otherwise, instead of meriting a reward, they shall be reserved for severe chastisement. (48)

St. Thomas teaches that every one is obliged to practise what is suited to the state that he has chosen. And according to St. Augustine, a man by entering the ecclesiastical state imposes on himself the obligation of being holy. And Cassiodorus calls the clerical profession a heavenly life. The priest is, as Thomas à Kempis says, bound to greater perfection than all others, because the priesthood is the most sublime of all states. Salvian adds, that in things in which God counsels perfection to seculars, he makes it imperative on ecclesiastics. (49-50).

Chapter V: The Injury That Tepidity Does to the Priest

II. A Priest Cannot be Satisfied with Avoiding Grievous Sins

Some priests may say that it is enough for me to avoid mortal sins and to save my soul. No, answers St. Augustine, you that are a priest, and therefore obliged to walk in the narrow way of perfection, shall not even save your soul by treading the broad way of tepidity - "When you say it is enough, you are lost." St. Gregory says that they that are to be saved as saints, and wish to be saved as imperfect souls, shall not be saved. And this our Lord one day gave Blessed Angela of Foligno to understand: "They that are enlightened by me to walk in the way of perfection, and through tepidity wish to tread in

the ordinary path, shall be abandoned by me.” (97) Perhaps God is bound to make graces abound in those that are parsimonious and ungenerous to him? No, says the Apostle, he who sows little shall reap but little. (2 Cor. ix.6) (98)

The Following from “The Eternal Priesthood” by Cardinal Manning of Westminster

Chapter XX: The Priest’s Death

Sooner or later--soon at latest, for the longest life is short and fleet in ending--it will go abroad that we are dying. Our turn will be come. We who have lived to stand by and see so many die, as if we should live for ever, we shall be lying on our deathbed at last. Will that day come upon us unawares? And shall we have time for the last Sacraments? Priests often die without them. When our people are sick, however suddenly, we are always near to watch beside them; when we are sick there is not always a priest at hand. Many priests live alone, scattered at great distances from their brethren. Moreover, priests grow so familiar with death that they are often not alarmed soon enough, or they are unconscious of their danger. It seems strange that a priest who so long has been preparing others to die should need it himself. Sometimes he is too hopeful, sometimes he procrastinates, and what is often said is often true -- he dies without the last Sacraments. (p. 272f)

If the sadder deathbeds here supposed be many, it is because they are of many kinds. All deaths of the penitent and the fervent are good: and one example is enough.

1. First, there is the death of a sinful priest; perhaps without the last Sacraments, as of an outcast, from whom it justly takes that which he seemeth to have; or, perhaps, and more fearful still, with the last Sacraments, but received in sacrilege. Next to the immutable malice of Satan is the hardness of an impenitent priest. ...How often he has said Mass with a threefold sacrilege--in consecrating, in communicating to himself, in communicating to others. It was a life written within and without with judgment against himself, and a life of unworthy handling of holy things. ...Then comes the end. A brother priest stands by him; but what is the soul within him? Is there a pulse of life, a beat of the heart, a ray of self-knowledge, a will to repent? Perhaps he was once an innocent boy, a youth of many hopes, a quick learner, a promising seminarist, a priest full of early aspirations and sincere intentions and good resolutions. But there was a flaw in the heart--some sin of the flesh or of the spirit, some passion or some pride. ...Many years ran on; many falls, returns, and relapses; many seasons and means of conversion lost or taken from him by the sin or folly of others; and the root became ineradicable, and conscience at last was silent. Then came the end.

Recordare Jesu pie, quod sum causa tuae viae, ne me perdas illa die. (Think kind Jesu! my salvation, Caused Thy wondrous Incarnation; Leave me not to reprobation)

2. Next, there is the death of a careless priest. He has had only one enemy, but the worst enemy of all, treacherous, ubiquitous, and ever about him-- that is, himself; an easy, yielding, indolent will. He has made no enemies, for he has not been in earnest enough about anything to offend anybody. All men speak well of him. The character of priesthood has in him no visible and unmistakable outline. He is a welcome visitor, a pleasant companion, a ready and amusing guest, read up in the newspapers, and full of the events of the day. He is what is called a general favourite, hurting nobody but himself, and that so secretly that only God, his angel guardian, his confessor, and perhaps some unknown and watchful friend can see it. He does not see, or hardly sees it himself. His preparation for Mass is never altogether omitted, but it is short and hurried: his Mass is rapid -- about twenty minutes -- and mechanical: his thanksgiving is short and soon over: his office is said unpunctually, hurriedly, and with little attention spiritual or intellectual. ...He gives the Sacraments and says the prayers in the Ritual. Then comes a silence. He has nothing to say. ...When death overtakes such a priest it finds him little prepared. Perhaps he has not had forethought enough to send for some brother priest, and therefore, time being short, the last Sacraments come too late.

3. Then comes the death of a lax priest. Laxity differs from carelessness in this. A careless priest may set up in his mind a high standard, and may draw strict theories of duty. But through carelessness he does not act up to them. A lax priest lowers his standard and minimizes his obligations. He defends all opinions that favour human liberty, and looks upon strictness as rigour and Jansenism. Such priests excuse in themselves many things by the pleas, "I am not a religious" and "I am only a secular priest." ...The direct effect of such laxity is to discourage aspiration for perfection among the faithful whose lot is cast in the world. And yet all Christians are called to be perfect, in whatsoever state of life. ...When such a priest comes to die, he often has little brightness, or joy, or confidence. He has not dealt generously with his Master, and in his last need he finds too late that they who have most denied themselves for His sake are most like Him; and that they are most free who have offered up their liberty by daily sacrifices of lawful things.

4. After the lax priest comes the worldly priest, the true secular in name and spirit. He finds at last that he has served the wrong master, that in trying to serve two masters he has earned "wages to put it into a bag of holes." (Aggeus i.6) The world is passing from him, leaving him empty-handed, and in the eternal world which is opening he has laid up little reward. ...The world has stolen away the heart of such a priest. It is no longer in his silent

room, nor in the fellowship of his brethren, nor in the sanctuary, nor in his priesthood. It is somewhere abroad, in some house, or in some friendship, or in some intimacy. And when such a priest comes to die he cannot choose but cast up his reckoning, and make a horarium of his life. How many hours have I spent at the altar, and how many in the world? How many in the homes of the poor, and how many in the homes of the rich? ... If the worldly priest had given the energy and diligence which he wasted on the world to the work of his own perfection, he might have been a Saint.

5. Lastly, - for we must end -- comes the death of a fervent priest. The world never knew him, or passed him over as a dim light outshone by the priests who court it. But in the sight of God what a contrast. Ever since his ordination, or earlier, ever since his second conversion to God, he has examined his conscience day by day, and made up his account year by year; he has never failed in his confession week by week, or in his Mass morning by morning, or in his office punctually and in due season. He has lived as if by the side of his Divine Master, and, beginning and ending the day with Him, he has ordered all the hours and works of the day for His service. He has lived among his people, and their feet have worn the threshold of his door. His day comes at last, and a great sorrow is upon all homes when it is heard that the father of the flock is dying, and the last Sacraments have been given to him. And yet in that dying-room what peace and calm. He has long cast up his reckoning for himself and for his flock. He has long talked familiarly of death, as of a friend who is soon coming. He fears it, as an awful transit from this dim world to the great white Throne, and as a sinner, an unprofitable servant, and a creature of the dust, he shrinks; for the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Life-giver, is in the centre of his soul, casting light upon all that is to be confessed and sorrowed for, and absolving the contrite soul from all bonds of sin and death. None die so happily as priests surrounded by their flocks. ...If such be the death of a fervent priest it may be sudden: it cannot be unprepared. His whole life is a preparation for death.