

CONFERENCE TWO

THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

The subject of this conference is the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. In this priesthood the ordained priest participates in persona Christi and is called to form the laity as the royal priests summoned to generate a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). The priest has a special relation to the three divine persons and to the Mother of God. Christ lives in the priest. His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is very specially the mother of the priest. The priest is the son of the Father whom Jesus came to reveal. The priest is animated by the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, who is the master of the spiritual life. Thus the priest is related to the persons of the Blessed Trinity and to Mary.

There is a profound value in discussing the priesthood in relation to the three persons of the Trinity. The Trinity is all-inclusive. In the three persons and the processions, which constitute the second and third persons, we have the inner life of the Trinity. Its outer life results in creation, redemption, and sanctification: the mysteries of Christ, of which we are the ministers.

There is no antecedent to the Father. The Father is the beginning of everything. One cannot go beyond Him. As we know and preach, of Him the Son is begotten, and the Father and Son breathe forth in their mutual love the Holy Spirit. The incarnate Son has the fullness of the divinity and works our salvation. The Holy Spirit proceeding from the son completes the work of Jesus, always with reference to Him, giving birth to and sustaining the development of the Church and of the disciples who comprise the Church. This, then, is the Trinitarian framework in which I wish to review with you the spirituality of the priest, his ministry and life.

The priest's spirituality, his holiness, renews the priesthood upon which rests the renewal of the Church, the salvation of the world, the healing of the wounds of society, and the spiritual and psychological health of persons. The first sentence of Vatican II's *Decree on the Training of Priests* states, "The council is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the Spirit of Christ." A footnote adds, "It is clear . . . by the will of Christ Himself that the progress of the whole People of God depends in the highest degree on the ministry of priests. This is supported by the statements of the Fathers and of the saints and by a whole series of papal documents."

The priest is Jesus Christ in His salvific role present in the world here and now, at this time and in this place. Without the priest there is no Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary destined to be repeated throughout the world. "In every place a sweet offering is made to my Name" propitiating God for innumerable offenses, reconciling God to man and men to each other, making available the graces of salvation to the congregation and the world for which it is offered. The Mass can only exist through the priest. Likewise, the assurance of forgiveness, made available in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, depends upon the priest. The world, society, and individuals need these graces for their salvation, healing, and psychological well-being, for grace increases the individual's psychological resources.

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The priest makes Jesus Christ present in His passion, death, and Resurrection. He acts in persona Christi in administering the Sacraments, in proclaiming the Gospel, in preaching and teaching. The renewal of the Church depends upon the priest allowing Jesus Christ to live and speak and act through him. If he does this the Church and society will be renewed and there will be a continual flow of priestly vocations. We need holy priests. Holy priests are happy in the priesthood. Happy holy priests attract priestly vocations.

There are many factors working against vocations: single parent families, divorced and remarried parents, pedophilic priests casting a pall over the priesthood, lack of unity in the faith, poor liturgies, priests who are unaware of the desire that candidates for the priesthood have for orthodoxy without rigidity and with pastoral sensitivity. All these factors work against vocations, but are not insuperable if there are holy priests.

The new evangelization is the priest proclaiming and explaining the doctrine of Jesus Christ and persuading, counseling, and helping others and himself to live this doctrine. Both the priesthood of the faithful and the ordained priesthood, which differ in kind, are a participation in the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ and derive their power from His priesthood.

The first step in placing the priesthood in its relation to the Trinity is taken when we consider who Jesus Christ our High Priest is. The priesthood is related to the Trinity through Jesus Christ and His priesthood. I will follow the teaching of the Church as it was developed through early Councils and as it is taught today, drawing especially on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, the common doctor of the Church, and on modern science.

Jesus Christ is High Priest from the moment of His conception. At that moment the Word took into union with Himself a human nature. I wish to pause to consider this very moment. The process of development of a human being begins when a spermatozoon enters an ovum, fertilizing it. This begins the cell divisions that lead to tissue and organ formation. An unfertilized female gamete in the absence of the male gamete may begin to develop, as happens in the case of a frog, because of chemical, electrical, or physical stimulation. In such a case a frog is formed without the benefit of a male principle. This is called parthenogenesis, a word composed of the Greek Parthenon, meaning virgin, and the Latin genesis.

In Mary the Holy Spirit provided this stimulation. The Holy Spirit also provided additional genetic material; otherwise, the result would have been a clone of Mary and a female. Recalling our zoology we remember that in the ovum-bearing cell there are two x-chromosomes. When this cell divides each generated cell has an x-chromosome. In the male gamete there are both x- and y-chromosomes. Spermatozoa formed by cell division carry either an x- or a y-chromosome. If the y-bearing spermatozoon unites with an ovum the result will be a male.

It was necessary then, when Mary's ovum, which was to form the body of Jesus, began dividing through the influence of the Holy Spirit, that a y-chromosome be contributed miraculously. Normally when an ovum is fertilized, having all the DNA necessary to form a human being, the soul is united to this fertilized cell and a human person results. At this point in the case of Jesus' conception, the second person of the Trinity, the Son assumed the conceptus, and the result was a divine person having both a human and a divine nature.

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That there is no human person in Jesus, a human personality but not a human person, is defined doctrine. In other words, there are not two persons in Jesus, a human and a divine, contrary to the impression which scripture exegesis and modern Catholic thought sometimes seems to give. When we are in a state of grace we are human persons inhabited by a divine person. As partakers of the divine nature we have two natures, a human and divine. But they are not united in a single person as in the case of Jesus. And the participation we have in the divine nature depends on our being in a state of grace. It can be transient. In Jesus there is a permanent union of the divine and human natures in one person, a divine person.

According to our explanation of Jesus' conception, Jesus would resemble Mary closely since His genetic material came from her, with whatever additions, such as the y-chromosome provided by the Holy Spirit's miraculous action when he overshadowed Mary. We know the belief of both a human and divine person in Jesus as the Nestorian heresy.

In Jesus, His human nature is not immediately united with His divine nature. Such a fusion between the finite and infinite would obliterate the finite. Instead, Jesus' human nature is united to the second person of the Trinity, the Son of the Father. A person is the subject of its actions and sufferings. Thus, we do not say that my hand shook your hand, but I, a person, shook hands with you, a person. If we are struck in the face by a blow we say, I was struck in the face by the blow. The person suffered the blow. To repeat, the person is the subject of actions produced or suffered. Hence, since Jesus is a divine person, what He in His human nature did and suffered was done and suffered by the divine person who is God. Let me put it this way. If Jesus smiles at you it is God who is smiling at you. If Jesus appears and embraces you it is God embracing you. It would seem that a human person is smiling at you or embracing you. This is the quite understandable stumbling block of those who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And if Jesus was struck, as He was in the passion, it is God who was struck. The person is the subject of what he does or suffers. This means that whatever Jesus did or suffered had an infinite value. It also excludes any inappropriate or sinful action on the part of Jesus, because God does not act inappropriately and does not sin.

St. Thomas explains that while Jesus is like us in all things but sin, as St. Paul affirmed, He is also exempt from certain defects that follow upon sin, while not exempt from others. He could and did experience cold, hunger, fatigue, and death. But He did not have a fallen human nature. He had the beatific vision from the moment of His conception. Karl Rahner admitted this but preferred not to call this vision beatific which implied for him that Jesus was not on the way but had arrived. For St. Thomas He both was on the way as a human being and, since His human nature was the nature of a divine person, He had arrived. St. Thomas also holds that Jesus had infused knowledge. Both Rahner and Thomas agree that Jesus grew in experiential knowledge.

The importance of attributing infused knowledge to Jesus is that by this knowledge He knew particulars which were beyond the grasp of His senses and experience. He knew each of us. Scripture says that Jesus knew what is in man. Scripture again and again tells us that He knew what was transpiring in the minds of men, both His disciples and adversaries. He knew also what was to befall Him and warned the apostles about it. By infused knowledge He saw, during the agony of Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary, all our sins, and made them His own. But He also saw our repentance

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and the amendment of our lives. About this Pius XII said, “He who loves will understand.”

As Adam and Eve before the fall had original justice so also did Jesus, and also Mary, in virtue of her immaculate conception. This means that their imaginations, reminiscences, and emotions were subject to their intelligence and wills. In a human nature deprived of original justice, such as we all have, the imagination and emotions can rebel against the will bringing to mind thoughts and feelings that are unwanted. While Jesus’ emotions had their proper role in His nature and could be moved by His experiences, they were not moved beyond His rational control. This is something that Martin Scorsese, dependent as he was on a scriptural exegesis unguided by systematic theology did not understand in producing his film “The Temptation of Jesus.”

Dogma and systematic theology, theology from above, can help us to know the limits of what we can posit of Jesus in our speculations and meditations. Through Catholic dogma we know that while Jesus was like us in all things except sin, nevertheless, we cannot posit what contradicts His nature as God or His nature as man. It is through systematic theology that we know that Jesus had original justice and although He made himself sin and took upon Himself all our sins to annihilate them, He did not have certain defects that follow upon sin.

Since death is the separation of soul and body, Jesus’ death was real. His soul and body were truly separated while He was in the tomb. But His soul was the soul of a divine person. His body was the body of a divine person, even the dead body of a divine person. In other words, when Jesus took a human nature it was breakable in one sense and unbreakably united to His divine person, and likewise His body was unbreakably united to His divine person. This is the astounding paradox: while Jesus lay dead in a tomb, God was both life itself and dead.

In this century, and especially since Vatican Council II, the importance of the laity and of women in particular and the essential role that they play in the Church and society has become increasingly evident. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the apostolic role of the laity stems, not from the hierarchy, but from the sacraments of initiation: baptism, and confirmation. The initiative for this role proceeds from the laity themselves under the inspiration of grace. As Jeremiah said, “This is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, crying ‘Learn to know Yahweh!’ No, they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest” (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Nevertheless, it is the priest who must form the laity so that they may play this role as royal priests destined to form a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9-10) See also Apoc. 1:6, 5:9-10).

The renewal of the Church depends upon the priest being Jesus Christ, thinking like Jesus Christ, speaking like Jesus Christ, and acting like Jesus Christ. The priest must allow Jesus Christ to live and speak and act through him. If he does this the Church and society will be renewed and there will be no shortage of priestly vocations. We do not need married priests to overcome the shortage of vocations, we need holy priests. That is why we are here in this seminar, myself included. And what is the new evangelization but the priest proclaiming and explaining the doctrine of Jesus Christ and persuading, counseling, and helping others and himself to live this doctrine?

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How will this come about in us? We do not need to invent this doctrine. “No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe” [Deuteronomy 30:14 NRSV]. The Church offers us this doctrine through its pastors, its saints and, in our day, particularly through the Catechism of the Catholic Church. What we must do is possess it. Possessing it and living it - that is spirituality. That is why the spirituality of the priest is so important. It is by his spirituality that the priest allows Christ to live in him, to speak in him, and to accomplish the Father’s will which is the well-being of individuals, the Church, and society. Insofar as the priest is wanting in spirituality, in holiness, all that he is destined to be and to do is flawed, without prejudice however to the validity and sanctifying power of the sacraments which he administers. There is no substitute, no alternative to priestly holiness. The priest must become holy. If the salt loses its savor it is good for nothing but to be trampled upon by men. And women can do a very good job in trampling on the salt that has lost its savor – the priesthood that is not holy.

The dedication of the priest to Christ and his availability to the people is signified by his choice of celibacy. The priest freely chooses celibacy after mature deliberation extending over several years. It is chosen for the sake of the kingdom. “Let him who can take it, take it,” says Jesus. Celibacy would be next to impossible to maintain but for grace. It is a gift of God to the Latin Church.

For a time after the Council, which rightly extolled married life, it was held that celibacy even for the sake of the kingdom is not superior to the married state. The value of marriage in human development was appropriately promoted, but celibacy was inappropriately demoted. This came at a time of many destabilizing changes in the Church and in society and contributed to the loss of many priestly vocations. The supposed superiority of marriage to celibacy in human development, and the placing of marriage on a par with celibacy in the pursuit of holiness was not the teaching of the Council. In the *Decree on the Training of Priests* the traditional doctrine is clearly stated: celibacy for the kingdom is a special grace, exceeding the grace of marriage. This does not mean that married people may not be holier than celibate priests. All are called to the same holiness. The Latin priest is given a special means making him especially available to the people and witnessing to the life to come, but how well he uses this grace depends upon him. We all experience failures in putting ourselves at the disposal of others. We remain to a degree self-centered, some of us more than others, some part of the time or all of the time, some decreasingly as we make spiritual progress. Similarly, a married person may fail to be centered on the spouse and children, at some times, or all of the time, or decreasingly as they make spiritual progress. A Catholic, having the fullest means for holiness available to him or her, may be inferior in grace to a non-Catholic who is more faithful in the use of the means available to him to love God and others.

The priest partakes of the ministry of bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles, and has an apostolic vocation. In this vocation, like the bishop, he is Teacher or Prophet, Priest, and Ruler or Leader. As a leader he is a minister putting his services at the disposal of his people, ordering all the ministerial activities available to him to their benefit. As a prophet or teacher he delivers the teaching of Christ as taught in the Church by his words and by his example. By preaching he gathers together the people of God and leads them to holiness. As a priest he administers the sacraments which are the keys to the kingdom, on a regular basis the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. All

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his activities are ordered to the Eucharist which the Council calls the summit and center of the Christian life. This order is expressed in the *Decree of Priestly Ministry and Life* in this way: "Through the ministry of priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is completed in union with the sacrifice of Christ, the only mediator, which in the Eucharist is offered through the priests' hands in the name of the whole Church in an unbloody and sacramental manner until the Lord comes. The ministry of the priest is directed to this and finds its consummation in it. For their ministration which begins in the announcement of the Gospel, draws its force and power from the sacrifice of Christ and tends towards this." Here we have the acknowledgment firstly, of the importance of preaching through which faith comes and through which the people of God are gathered and sanctified, and secondly, of the source of the power of this preaching, namely, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist. This declares the subordination of preaching to the Eucharist. Preaching leads to the Eucharist where the unity of the people of God is perfected.

The priest remains a human person with all the frailty of a human being. This will be taken into account in these conferences. As a helpmate he is given in a special way the Blessed Virgin Mary. As we know, all the privileges and graces accorded the Blessed Virgin Mary were in view of God's choice of her to be His Mother. As His Mother she was His close collaborator. In fact, chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, which is entirely devoted to Mary, points out that she was the associate of Christ. This means that she was His associate in the work of the redemption. As the Bride of the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed her at the moment of the Incarnation, she also is the collaborator of the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification. *Lumen Gentium* refers to the patristic texts about Mary in which she is called the second Eve as Christ is the second Adam. As such, she is the mother of all humankind bringing them spiritual and eternal life, the life won for them by her Son. However much we glorify Mary, and she herself said that all generations would call her Blessed, a prophecy fulfilled in the Church, we know that she is a creature. We know that her graces were won for her by the foreseen passion and death of her Son, as the decree of the Immaculate Conception states. To the question why Jesus had to suffer and die, we can say He did so that His Mother might be conceived immaculately and receive the graces to accompany Him in His life, work, death, and Resurrection. There is one Mediator between God and man and that is Jesus Christ. But by the wonderful condescension of the Father we are all called to participate in His work, and the first in doing so is the Blessed Virgin Mary. We are all co-redeemers, and Mary is the first.

Modern exegesis calls our attention to Mary's role also as Christ's disciple. As St. Luke says in his gospel, Mary kept all these things in her heart and pondered on them. They informed her life and activity. A mother has a special sensitivity to the child of her womb and this was especially true of Mary. The more so that Jesus' genes, his hereditary make-up as a human being, came from Mary with the exception of what was supplied miraculously by the Holy Spirit. The bond between them was especially close. There was nothing to prevent the Son of God, as He was being carried for nine months in Mary's womb, from conversing with her as she meditated on the Annunciation, His coming to be in her womb, and her carrying and nourishing Him. Moreover, Mary was a Jewish maiden with intelligence entirely purified of dullness by her Immaculate Conception. Hence, she was especially enlightened in the Jewish scriptures, particularly as it was her

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function as well as that of Joseph of introducing Jesus in His humanity to them. She would have known how to find her Son in the Hebrew Scriptures who is hidden there, as the fathers say.

Lumen Gentium tells us that Mary's faith, hope, and charity is an example for us, and that she is herself a type of the Church. Meditating on her we can advance in the knowledge of Christ. It is clear to us that Mary is not, as many Protestants think, an obstacle to union with Christ for Catholics. An astute Presbyterian minister who is also a professor of Philosophy at Princeton, Diogenes Allen, in his book *Temptation* says that for the orthodox Mary is the Mother of God, for Catholics she is the Blessed Virgin Mary, but for Protestants she is an embarrassment. They don't quite know what to do with her. They know that she is the Mother of Jesus, and they know the texts of St. Luke about her. But they have been derailed in their understanding of her by the polemic set up by Protestantism about her, and the supposed idolatry of Catholics in worshipping her. This opinion is not universal among Protestants. The father of a good friend of mine was the Anglican Rector of a church in Brooklyn titled Saint Mary. Other examples, including Protestant writings, will come to your minds.

The truth is, as Blessed Grignon de Montfort explains in his book *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Mary was entirely devoted to Jesus as Jesus was to the Father. If one were to glance into Mary's heart at any moment, one would find it occupied with her divine Son. Devotion to Mary leads us to be centered on Jesus, and when we think of Jesus, Mary has done her work in us, and this is her entire desire.

When I became a Catholic in adulthood my first concentration was on Jesus, but very soon I was drawn to Mary, and within a couple of years of my baptism I made the consecration to her explained by de Montfort. This has in no way interfered with my being centered on Jesus. Similarly, when one is centered on Jesus one comes to recognize that Jesus' heart, aflame by the Holy Spirit, is centered on His Father, and this leads us to a filial devotion to the Father. This becomes a mystical cycle as the Father directs us to the Holy Spirit who in turn has all that He is and has from the Son, and who directs us to understand the words and person of the Son.

Not everyone is swept up in this mystical cycle. But it has a work to do in completing the upbringing never completed by our parents. The natural defects in our devotion to our mother and father are overcome by our devotion to Mary, to Jesus, and to the Father.

We tend to view Mary according to our dispositions towards our mothers, and to the Father according to our dispositions towards our fathers. And these dispositions can be purified and healed by the recognition of Mary's motherhood of us and the Father's solicitous care of us. This occurs through prayer and reflection. These healing truths will be touched upon in these conferences

Now if Mary is the mother of Christ, and if the priest is another Christ, then Mary is in a special way the mother of the priest. Truly, she is the mother of everyone but especially of those who share the faith in her Son, those who are members of His body and particularly those who are his priests, and we may add among His priests, His bishops and the Pope. As the mother of the priest, she has a special affection for him even if he is wayward. True mothers never give up on their children, and Mary is close to her wayward priest sons, to draw them back to devotion to her Son and to their mission of being the light, love, and joy of her Son and of His people. Thus, in his darkest moments

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the priest can rely on Mary for her protection and help. This will help him to return to or remain in the solid doctrine of the Church, to abide in charity, and to dwell within, with the indwelling Jesus, the source of his apostolic activity.

In this conference we have spoken of the necessity for the renewal of Church and society, of the renewal of the priesthood, such that the priest allows Jesus to live and act in and through Him and becomes his beloved and dear companion, the love of his heart. And we have spoken of the helpmate given the priest in the Mother of Jesus, who is especially the mother of the priest.



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