

RCIA Retreat: Saturday, 18 March 2017

The Vocation to be Priests, Prophets and Kings.

Jesus: Prophet, Priest, and King

Where does “priest, prophet and king” appear in the Bible? Are we as good Catholics considered priest, prophet and king?

I don't think you will find that phrase “priest, prophet, king” in the Bible, but you will in the Catechism (nos. 897-913). There are many things we do and believe that are not specifically stated in the Bible, such as “Mass” or “Trinity”. However, all over the Old Testament you will find priests (Aaron, the Levite tribe), prophets (Elijah, Elisha, Moses), and kings (David, Solomon). All of these Old Testament persons in some way pre-figure Jesus: the true priest, prophet, and king. And in one sentence (1 Kgs. 1:45) you will find the three terms (priest, prophet, king), but applied to three different people: “Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed David as king.”

A **priest**, according to the O.T. = one who offers sacrifice to God on behalf of all. This makes a priest a mediator, a bridge, between God and humanity. Once a year on the Day of Atonement the Jewish high priest went into the Holy of Holies in the Temple. There he offered sacrifice to God to make up for his sins and the sins of the people.

The Letter to the Hebrews compares Jesus to Melchizedek, a mysterious priest in the O.T. who blessed Abraham. Jesus is the greatest high priest. Because he is both divine and human, Jesus is the perfect mediator. He is not only the perfect priest, holy and sinless. He is the perfect sacrifice as well; He offers himself as a perfect sacrifice such that there need never be another sacrifice again. Jesus, as priest, “entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

A **prophet** is not one who foretells the future, as we usually think. Although this is a part of the prophet's ministry, a prophet is primarily a messenger sent by God, a person who speaks for God, who witnesses to God, and calls people to conversion. Prophets often are killed for their message.

Jesus is the perfect prophet. He is the Word of God in the flesh. He called the world to turn from sin and return to the Father. He was put to death for it. In Scripture Jesus is presented as a prophet. Crowds identified him as “Jesus the prophet” (Matt. 21:11). He spoke of himself as a prophet: “No prophet is accepted in his own native place” (Lk. 4:24). He foretold his passion and resurrection.

A **king** is a person who has supreme authority over a territory. It was only when the Jewish people were ruled by kings, that they became a united nation. They longed for a Messiah who would again make them a great nation.

Jesus is spoken of as a king in the Gospels. Gabriel announced to Mary that the Lord God would give her son the throne of David his father. Magi looked for a newborn king of the Jews. When Jesus last entered Jerusalem, crowds hailed him as a king. When He was arrested the soldiers mocked him as a king. When Pilate asked if he were king of the Jews, Jesus replied, "You say so," and he clarified, "My kingdom does not belong to this world" (Jn. 18:36). The charge written against Jesus was "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews." Jesus' mission was to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. His mission was to have God Kingdom in the hearts of all and to have peace and justice in the world. Jesus exercised this royal office by serving.

At your baptism you were marked with oil as a sign that you are consecrated to God and anointed by the Holy Spirit. Your anointing also was a sign that you are joined to Christ and share in his threefold mission as prophet, priest, and king.

The Israelites anointed their priests and kings with oil. They spoke of their prophets as being anointed with the spirit. Jesus, known as the Christ, the anointed one, like the priests, prophets and kings of the Old Testament. According to Luke, at the outset of his public ministry, Jesus read from Isaiah and claimed that the words referred to him: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. (Lk 4:18).

By our Baptism we are joined to Christ, and are made partakers in the divine nature. By virtue of our baptism, all members of the faithful, in various ways, share in the triple mission of Christ: priest, prophet, and king. This is referred to as the common priesthood, the priesthood of all the baptized.

The Second Vatican Council sought to uphold the fundamental right of the laity to express in freedom their charisms in the Church and in the world. In acknowledging the inherent dignity of the common priesthood of the baptized the council called for collaborative ministry between the clergy and the laity, originating from Christ and guided by the Spirit.

This development opened a new understanding of the theology of the laity.

The Church as the People of God is made up of bishops, priests, deacons, religious and the laity. As one body of Christ, the Church is about building the Kingdom of God. The role of the laity in the mission of the Church is special and indispensable. "The Church can never be without the lay apostolate; it is something that derives from the layman's very vocation as a Christian" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* [AA] 1).

There is the need therefore for their identity and presence to be recognized in the Church and in the world.

Definition of the Laity

The Second Vatican Council lifted the concept of the laity out of the negative status of “non-priests” and set them positively among the faithful people of God sharing fully in the salvific mission of the Church. The Council thus defined the laity as the faithful who, though not in Holy Orders and not belonging to the Religious Orders, are incorporated into Christ by baptism and placed in the People of God (*Lumen Gentium* [LG] 31).

The laity belong fully to the Church and to its mystery. They are the presence of the Church in the world, not as some second arm of the Church, but as the Church. They derive their life and fruitfulness from Christ. Undeniably, the laity are the face of the Church in the world. Not only do they belong to the Church, they are the Church (CL 9). The laity are therefore defined by their active membership of the Church as the people of God, ensuring that the Church’s mission on earth is accomplished. Indeed, the destiny of the whole Church is thus placed in their hands as well.

They have a mutual complementarity with the clergy.

They participate in the total mission of the Church in a non-hierarchical way, their role given by charism not by office.

In addition, they are contrasted with those in religious life, since the laity are not in a life committed to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The laity exercise their call to holiness often in terms of their single state, marriage and family life. And though those in religious life might undertake some secular activities, the laity are more present to the world than they are. Thus, they have a Christian relationship with the world through their everyday activities of family, work, learning and play that make up the good of human society.

The position of the laity in the Church is marked by the new life in Christ received in baptism and confirmation.

Mission as Priest, Prophet and King

The mission of the laity has its roots in Jesus commissioning the “seventytwo others” to bring the message of the Kingdom of God to the world (Luke 10:1-11).

The word “others” in verse 1 shows that the seventy-two are a number distinct from the twelve apostles which can thus be referred to as the laity in our present context. The need for the service of the laity in carrying out the mission of Christ is emphasized when Christ said in verse 2: “The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest.” The New Testament affirms the fruitfulness of the activity of those who were not apostles in the early days of the Church (cf. Act 11:19-21; 18:26; Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3).

Fundamental to the mission of the laity is the universal call to holiness. It is Christ who gives the laity a share in his priestly, prophetic and kingly mission as he intimately links them to his life and mission. Inasmuch as they are called to personal holiness, they are also called to sanctify the world, with their holiness being a sign and instrument of grace and reconciliation for others.

1. Priest

The priesthood of the faithful involves two different senses: the general sense ... holiness of life in the offering of oneself to God, and a specific sense ... sacramental worship, participation in the offering of the Eucharist. The lay faithful are sharers in the priestly mission for which Christ offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist.

They offer daily spiritual sacrifices in union with Christ for the glory of the Father and the salvation of humanity and then bring these up in the offering of the gifts to be united with the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Consequently, the laity are united to Christ and to his sacrifice through the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities. St. Paul in speaking of sacrificing one's body writes that: "I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1). This sacrifice is the holiness of life the laity are called to live.

The lay faithful fulfil their priestly mission by their constant endurance of the hardships in life. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, they offer their works, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. These sacrifices are offered along with the body of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist (CL 14). Their offering of the bread and wine to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ is the offering of their labour, lives and the world to God that they may be transformed into Christ's own self.

What they can do in the secular world, they can do as an offering to God done in Christian charity which sanctifies it. Their mission begins with the *ite missa est*, go the Mass is ended. Thus, as they worship by their holy actions, they consecrate the world to God (LG 34).

In marriage, the priesthood of a husband and wife is more than a simple application of the spiritual priesthood of holiness, for it is a sacrament. The parents are able to exercise their priestly mission when they enter into family worship at home – sharing meals at table, grace before and after meals, personal intercessory prayers for their children, Bible reading, etc.

More so, "the state of being of a husband and wife, inspired by true love and consent that is free and heart-felt, is very properly a state of sacrifice; it is therefore a priestly state" (Congar 204). There are a lot of sacrifices in marriage in the sense of self-giving where husband and wife offer themselves up completely to each other and to their children in love. Also, the command to offer one's body (Rom 12:1) is fulfilled in a unique way in the giving of the spouses' bodies to each other in the conjugal act, and in another sense, of the mother to the child. These are natural acts of self-giving, but in the sacrament of marriage they also share in the grace of Christ and the mystery of his great nuptial love for us.

2. Prophet

A prophet proclaims the truth about God and humanity. This is what the laity share in as they are given the ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil. Through this office, they are sharers in the Church's faith and sharers as well in the grace of the word (LG 12; CL

14). As those who share in the prophetic office of Christ, the laity are witnesses of the faith, proclaiming the gospel in their everyday family and social lives. They are to be witnesses of truth which is Christ himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn. 14:6). This mission comes from Christ: "you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). "Teaching through witness is not given through words alone; often its more effective form is that of belief translated quite simply into life with no attempt at persuasion" (Congar). The laity then are to teach and practice the Church's beliefs.

The laity in their prophetic mission exercise the apostolate of evangelization. The very witness of a Christian life and good works are effective in drawing others to the faith and to God (AA 6). This emphasizes what Christ said: "Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt. 5:16).

Announcing Christ by a living testimony and the spoken word takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world (LG 35). The laity then must know that they serve as ambassadors of Christ and his Church wherever they are. Also, with the family being the domestic Church, parents must be the witnesses and primary teachers of the faith to their children. Their prophetic mission is a penetration of the Gospel into the way they live, which primarily starts in the family.

In the Church communities, the laity are encouraged to develop the habit of working in the parish in close union with their priests, of sharing their challenges with the ecclesial community and discussing questions regarding the faith. They are to support missionary works by providing material means and personal service (AA 10).

Adults should enter into friendly dialogue with the young sharing with them their experiences and giving them sound advice and practical help (AA 12). In their patriotism and fidelity to their civic duties, the laity should feel bound to promote the true common good, making their convictions which are influenced by the faith so influential in the society (AA 14).

The laity should bear witness to Christ everywhere on earth and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

Even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world.

This shows the eschatological nature of Christian living, that is, Christian life on earth must also point towards and give witness to "the life of the world to come". Thus, the laity are to renew their own love for Christ and then share their faith with others who may have drifted away from the faith or who have never heard the Gospel message.

3. King

The laity, belonging to Christ who is King of the universe, share in his kingly mission. The Kingdom of God is promised to them (Mat 25:34) and they are made kings: "You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth" (Rev 5:10). Their kingship role is to be understood spiritually not politically. "Spiritual kingship is that which recognizes the divine meaning in things" (Congar).

The Lord desires that his kingdom be spread by the lay faithful: the kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace (LG 36). The laity exercise their kingship as Christians

in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves and others the kingdom of sin (*CL* 14). “The Christian is king because he triumphs over sin, controls the enticements of the flesh, and rules body and soul” (Congar). This is what the laity stand for as kings, and what a challenge that is for them since there is the lost sense of sin among many people in our contemporary world.

But the laity are also conscious of the Lord’s presence and support to them in the exercise of their mission for Christ said: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mat 28:20). The laity, as followers of Christ, share in the kingship and holiness of their Head only by submission to and union with God’s will, by adjusting themselves to the divine purpose for all humanity.

The kingship of the laity modelled after Christ is one of service: “the greatest among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). The laity work for the good of those whom they serve for the authority of the Church is one of service and not domination (*LG* 36; *CCC* 786). For the laity, a place of power is an opportunity for serving others.

The first royal power over the world given to humanity is dominion: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth” (Gen 1:28). The laity have dominion as co-creators with the Creator, who has given them the authority to order the world for human good to the glory of God. By working in harmony, they renew the world and make it increasingly more perfect: this is God’s design for the world.

The laity also order the sufferings of this world to the kingdom of God. This involves the laity working for justice and fighting against injustice, so that all that men and women do and accomplish is ordered to the truth and goodness of human dignity, not selfish and exploitative ends which distort and degrade it.

Conclusion

With the constant changing face of the world, the diversity in the areas of lay apostolate and for a better understanding and exercise of their mission, the laity must be constantly given human, social, doctrinal, spiritual, and apostolic formation. This formation is received from God, family (domestic Church), parish, schools and Catholic universities, groups, associations and movements.

The laity must live in communion with Jesus for that is an indispensable condition for bearing fruit (*CL* 32; *AA* 4; John 15:5). Also, there should be an enhancement of collaborative ministry among the hierarchy and the laity where each one’s role is respected and supported.

As sharers in the role of Christ the priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within Church communities that without it the apostolate of the priests is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness. This makes their assistance indispensable. We do well to conclude with the words of Blessed John Henry Newman:

I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious,
but people who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just
where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do

not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity.... You ought to be able to bring out what you feel and what you mean, as well as to feel and mean it.

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column/priest-prophet-king-1803/>

<http://www.seatofwisdomjournal.org/uploads/7.6 - Student Essay - The Mission of the Laity - C Adutwum - final - 20 Aug 2013.pdf>