

## Homily for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Did you ever wonder what the difference between a priest, a pastor, and a minister is? Or better yet, why do Catholics call their spiritual leaders priests, while Protestants typically refer to theirs as pastors, ministers, or even elders? What's so unique about being a "priest"?

So often in our Scripture readings we're accustomed to hearing passages where Jesus is conversing with the priests, not to mention the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the scribes. In the most general sense, a priest is "an authorized mediator who offers sacrifice to God on behalf of others." And when we look to the Old Testament, we see the Levitical priests – those from the chosen tribe of Levi – offering numerous sacrifices on behalf of all the tribes of Israel – bulls, and goats, and lambs, and doves, and grain, and flour, and oil. Different sacrifices were required for different situations. And so, the Israelites offered up burnt offerings, peace offerings, voluntary offerings, and sin offerings – just to name a few.

This whole sacrificial system was necessary because the blessings God gave to the Israelites were forfeited because of their constant infidelity. In other words they broke God's covenant with them time and time again – above all, in the desert, where they bowed down and worshipped the golden calf as Moses was preparing to give them God's Ten Commandments. Thus, there became the need to renew their covenant with God. And so the people offered up – not just sacrifices of atonement to God – imploring His forgiveness – but also acts of worship and praise to demonstrate their faithfulness as God's people.

And if we consider priests in this way – as they were at the time of Jesus – then we might be surprised to hear Jesus called a priest, because Jesus didn't offered up bulls or goats or lambs or the like as the Temple priests did. And yet we hear Jesus called "high priest" in our second reading today. In fact, it's only in the Letter to the Hebrews that we hear Jesus referred to as priest. And yet, as the Church teaches, Jesus truly is "our great high priest". How? Well, as the Son of God, Jesus is perfectly united to God, His Father; and as a man, He is perfectly united to us. And so, by virtue of being a bridge between God and man, He is *the* authorized mediator, *the* priest. And as *the* priest, Jesus offered up not just any sacrifice, but *the* one perfect sacrifice of His Body and Blood on the cross. So never again would sacrifices of lambs, and bulls, and grain, and oil be needed, because *the* Lamb of God offered Himself once, for all.

So, how do Catholic priests fit in to all of this? Well, if Jesus offered *the* perfect sacrifice, then what other sacrifice could priests, like me, offer? None other. The one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is sufficient to pay the price for our sins and wash us clean from the debt of our sins – He paid the ransom. But, if He did that nearly 2,000 years ago, how is it that we receive that one sacrifice into our lives and hearts personally today? It's through the Church that Jesus founded to continue His ministry on this earth – above all, in the sacraments. And in the Eucharist, when the priest offers up the bread and wine, He consecrates them, just as Jesus did at the Last Supper, when He gave the Disciples, in an un-bloodied manner, His Body and Blood, knowing that the next day on the cross He would offer up His same Body and Blood as the sacrifice of Calvary. And it's through the hands of the ordained priest that we receive this same sacrifice of Jesus, by which His ministry of salvation in the world continues on today.

And so as we gather today to celebrate this Mass, we see the Eucharist as a blessing God gives us through His priests. I want to tell you that my priesthood is such a joyful gift that I have received from the Lord. In the truest sense it's a sacrifice, both personally-speaking, and in the sense of being united to the Lamb of God Himself; but it's also truly a gift. It's a gift that I am so thankful to God for, and one that I am so thankful to be able to share with all of you. May the Lord's gifts come to His people throughout the world today, especially to those who don't yet know Him, especially through the hands of His priests. God bless you.