

Lesson 12

APOSTOLATE THROUGH PRIESTLY LIFE

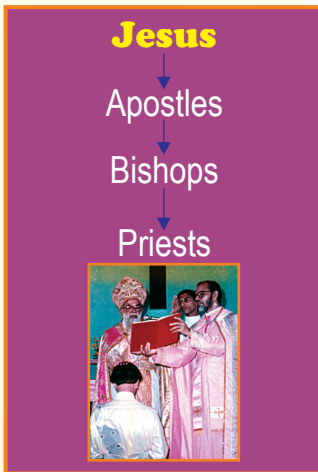


The letter to the Hebrews speaks about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross like this: “For then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself” - (Heb. 9:26). “When Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired; but a body you have prepared for me” (Heb. 10:5). Priests in the Old Testament served God daily by repeating the sacrifices incapable of removing sins. Whereas Jesus offered the sacrifice once for all for our sins (Heb. 10: 11-12).

Jesus sent by the Father fulfilled His mission by His own life of sacrifice. He proclaimed the eternal and great love of God through His sacrifice on the Cross. The greatest proclamation of Jesus was His sacrifice on the cross. The greatest missionary activity of priestly life is to sacrifice one's own life. Jesus is the only priest. All the other priests share His priesthood. Each Christian joins with the priesthood of Jesus through baptism and anointing. But God chooses some specially and appoints them for ministerial priesthood. Priests are those who receive such vocation.

Every Christian is called to be a disciple of Christ. But the one who receives this call for ministerial priesthood ought to live this discipleship in a deeper way. A special call and choice of God is there behind this. Jesus said: "You did not choose not you who me but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). Priesthood is a mission to be fulfilled with full responsibility offering oneself totally to God who called him. Each priest is bound to fulfill his mission which God entrusts him through the offering of his life. The priest fulfills this duty mainly through the proclamation of the Word, offering the Holy Mass and pastoring.

Activity-1. What are the good qualities you expect from a Priest ? Discuss.



The Status and Duties of Priesthood

The fullness of ministerial priesthood is given to the bishops by Jesus through the apostles. Priests are the co-workers of bishops. They remain as the representatives of Jesus, the Shepherd and head of the Church. They are called to be with Jesus, to proclaim the word of God, to administer the sacraments and to lead the people of God. They thus participate in the three missions of Jesus, to teach, to sanctify and to lead in building up the Church- the body of Christ. The fundamental mission of priests is to constantly build up, in the world, the Church - the people of God, the mystical body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. (P.O.1). Priests who

participate in the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal priest can act in His name - the Head. Hence they serve as mediators between God and men. They offer the prayers of the people of God to God and help them to know the will of God.



Through the Ministry of Teaching

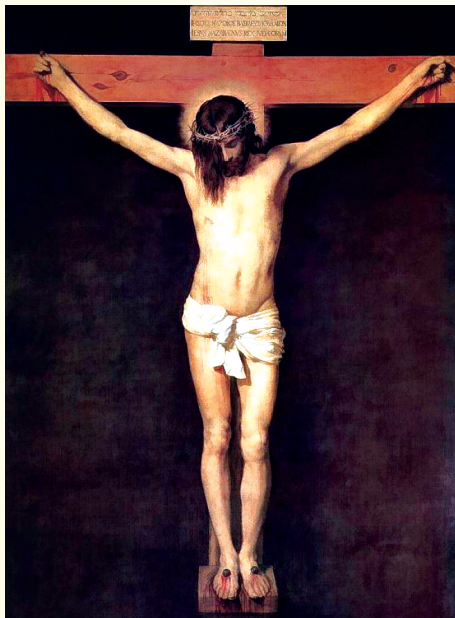
Evangelisation is a mission that deserves utmost importance in ministerial priesthood. The mission that Jesus entrusted to His disciples is to proclaim His Gospel and to give form and body to the Church. He said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28: 19-20).

The apostles had the conviction that becoming careless in the service of the word and doing table service is wrong and that they are to be engaged constantly in the service of the word of God and prayer (Acts. 6:2-4). That is why they appointed deacons for daily distribution. They made it very clear through this that the main task of a priest is the proclamation of the word of God. They must also be careful to practice what they preach. The apostles were careful to correct the individual and social evils. They pointed out and corrected the mistakes in the Christian life-style of the faithful. They did not fail to warn the Corinthian Church in strong language when there was division among them (1 Cor 1: 10-14; 11: 17-22).

The people of God are brought together through the sacred ministry of evangelisation (P.O.2). Proclamation is given more importance in areas where the Word is newly proclaimed because through proclamation ecclesial community is formed. Even in traditional ecclesial communities, priests have the duty to interpret correctly the teachings of the Church and to explain them according to the changes of the times. II Vatican Council teaches that the primary duty of the priests are to proclaim the Gospel to all. Priests are obliged to give to all the truth of the Gospel which they have received in such a way that will enable the people to rejoice in God.

Through the public preaching, they proclaim the mystery of Christ. They do not teach their own wisdom; instead, their main duty is to lead all to conversion and self-sanctification through the teaching of the Word of God". (P.O. 4). They are the preachers and teachers who teach faith to the people of God. The missionary nature of a priest is manifested through the ministry of proclamation. The hallmark of priestly ministry is proclamation. The Apostolic exhortation 'Proclamation of the Gospel (EN 68) reminds us of this.

Through the Ministry of Sanctification



Priests are chosen from men to give offerings and sacrifices in atonement for sins and appointed to deal with divine things for men (Heb. 5:1). Priests, by their priestly ministry offer to God the Father, the spiritual sacrifices of the faithful uniting it with the sacrifice of Christ, the only mediator. The purpose of priestly ministry is to continue the bloodless and sacramental sacrifice of Jesus Christ offered in the name of the whole church through the priest until the second coming of Christ (P.O. 2). The New Testament priests are unlike the Old Testament priests who performed mere ceremonial service. They do sanctifying service through the administration of sacraments and proclamation of the word of God. Just like the apostles who presided over the service of the 'breaking of bread', in liturgy they give leadership to the worshipping community. The service of the priest is service for the Church.

Through Pastoral Service

Priest is the shepherd who knows the people of God. They are called to be persons attentive and considerate to the affairs of the flock, like Jesus, the good

shepherd. They must be followed by the flock. They must be working hard without rest for the welfare and progress of the flock entrusted to them. Priests are pastors leading others to Christian communion. They should unite the people of God in faith through their love for each individual. They are obliged to go after the straying ones and work for the growth and greatness of their flock.

Activity-2. Read the biography of Bl. Kunjachan Thevarparambil and prepare a write-up on his missionary spirit.

Second Vatican Council teaches thus about the Pastoral service of a priest. “When the priest fulfils the task of building the Church, like Jesus, they should deal with everyone very gently. They must do everything not to please men but to glorify God. They should be enthusiastic to serve the people of God at all times. Priests must be attentive to let the People of God grow in faith and give special consideration to the poor and the marginalised. They must specially pay attention to the needs of children, youth, married people and parents. Priests should always remember that in the family of God, religious occupy a high place. They have to be very much interested in the sick and the dying. Priests have the duty to prepare the way to lead not only the fithful but all peoples to Jesus, with great missionary zeal. They have to work hard for the people whom God has entrusted to them. When they are in trouble, he has to be there. He must visit houses and pray specially for the sick and the suffering. An individual, at each stage from birth till death must get the service of a priest. A priest has the duty to forgive sins and to console people burdened with sin and restless with mental problems. A priest should have the attitude to work hard for the development of the society, irrespective of caste or creed. Above all, his dealings should enable everyone who approach him to experience the loving presence of Jesus” (P.O.3).



Pastors need prudence and taking skills. They must be able to give good leadership to the society. According to the Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelisation Today' the different dimensions of priesthood are the following:

1. To preach the word of God with authenticity.
2. Unite the people of God and keep up that unity.
3. Nourish them with the sacraments.
4. Confirm them in the path of salvation.
5. Encourage them to perform their various duties.
6. Help each one to live according to their vocation (EN 68).

Thus, when the priests try to perform these tasks, depending on God's help and becoming aware of their limitations, they are doing true evangelisation work.

Let us Read the Word of God and Meditate

Jn. 21 : 15-19

A Word of God to Remember

"If I proclaim the Gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me and woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16).

Let us Pray

Jesus, the eternal priest, keep all priests holy and fill them with missionary zeal.

My Decision

I will respect priests and co-operate with them in their missionary activities.

Let us think with the Church

“By baptism, priests lead men to the community of the people of God. Through the sacrament of reconciliation, they reconcile sinners with God and His Church. Through anointing of the sick they comfort the sick. Above all, they offer the sacrifice of Christ sacramentally in the Holy Mass” (PO 5).

Let us find out the answers

1. All priests are participating in the priesthood of Jesus. Do you agree with this statement ? Why ?
2. What is the place of priesthood in the Church ?
3. Write a note on the teaching service of a priest.
4. What are the tasks of a priest as pastor and the one who offers the sacrifice ?
5. What are the different dimensions of priestly service ?