

Lesson-6

CHURCH: THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE



God chose Aaron and his Sons with the mission to offer sacrifice for the sanctification of the people of Israel. God ordered Moses to anoint Aaron. As per God's direction "Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe... Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it and consecrated them... And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him..." (Lev. 8:1-13).

This is the beginning of Israel's history of Priesthood. A priest in the Old Testament was set apart to offer worship to the Lord and as such, he was to be blameless and holy. His primary function was to offer sacrifices, gifts and incense to the Lord in the name of the people. He was to pray for the people and be a mediator between God and his people. A priest was to be a witness of God's holiness before his people. It was also his duty, as in Leviticus, "to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses" (Lev. 10:11).

Israel, A priestly people

God called Israel out from slavery in order to make them a people who would offer him worship and priestly service. For this purpose, he anointed Aaron and his sons and priests. God told Moses while making covenant at Sinai: “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all peoples; Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6).

The Priesthood of the Old Testament and the Priesthood of Jesus

Aaron and his sons were specially chosen by God to minister unto the Lord by offering worship and sacrifice... So priesthood was restricted to Aaron's family and his descendants. But the worship and sacrifice, offered by him was incomplete. Jesus in his talks with the woman of Samaria at the well of Jacob brought out the real significance and meaning of worship. He said, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...” (Jn. 4:23). By this Jesus meant the sacrifice which he had to accomplish and the sacrifice that has to be offered by the Church.

“And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices, that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:11-12). Jesus offered the real sacrifice to God on Calvary by laying down his life on the cross. Thus he became the eternal high priest. We read in Hebrews: “...he entered once for all into the Holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

The Priesthood of Jesus Christ

The Church offers worship to God through Jesus, the eternal priest. Jesus was not born in the priestly tribe of Levi, but in the kingly tribe of Judea. Therefore He could not be a priest according to his birth as he did not belong to the tribe of Levi. But Jesus is a priest as he is the Son of God. **Jesus the Son of God become an eternal priest through His sacrifice on the cross. As the new people of God, the Church participates in the eternal sacrifice Jesus offered in his own blood. Through this participation the**

Church becomes a priestly people and a worshipping community. The members of the Church become holy and redeemed and acceptable to God.

We are a Priestly People

By becoming members of the Church through baptism, we share in the royal priesthood of Christ. St. Peter says, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people...”** (1 Pet. 2:9). Those who are chosen specially for the service of the Church, participate in the ministerial priesthood. Those who are not called to the ministerial priesthood in the Church perform only the functions of royal priesthood. They should perform this function in association with their respective parish The Church, the parish priest and the community of believers. The document on the Church instructs us how Christians should exercise their priestly function.



For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"(199). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God (The Church, No.34).

The Holy Qurbana: The Noblest of all Worships

The Holy Qurbana is the highest form of worship the Church can offer to God. It is offered by Jesus Christ, the head, in association with the Church, his body, to the Eternal Father. At the same time, it is also a worship offered by the Church, the body of Christ, in union with Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Qurbana we participate in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the eternal priest.

The Ministerial Priesthood

As Christians, we share the priesthood of Jesus through baptism. **But some are specially chosen and anointed by God in order to minister to the people of God and to offer the sacrifice of sanctification. This is called the ministerial priesthood.**

However, both the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are participation in the one and the eternal priesthood of Christ. **The one who shares in the ministerial priesthood serves, leads and sanctifies the community of believers. He performs the holy sacrifice of Mass as a representative of Christ and offers it to God in the name of all the people** (The Church, No. 10).



We should become a priestly people who offer real worship to God by bearing patiently the sufferings and sorrows of daily life and by offering our bodies to do good for others.

Word of God to Read and Meditate

1 Pet. 2:1-10

Word of God to Remember

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Let us Pray

Jesus, our eternal high priest, help us to offer with pure hearts the Eucharistic sacrifice, which you gave to the Church to be offered till the end of the world.

My Resolution

I shall offer to God all the difficulties I face in my life in union with the sacrifice of Jesus.

To Think with the Church

Though they differ in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less correlated one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ (Vat. II, The Church, No. 10).

To Know the Mother Church

In early days, there was no seminary training for priestly candidates as we have today, among the Mar Thomma Christians. They were put under the care of some priests who were known for their knowledge and ability, and they trained these candidates. The priest who trained such candidates was known as 'Malpan'. The training did not have any specific duration. Those who were judged worthy for priestly ordination were raised to priesthood by the Bishop on the recommendation of the 'Malpan' who trained him and taking into consideration to the need for priests in the parish. Normally these ordained priests served in their own parish.

Questions

1. What were the functions of the priesthood in the Old Testament?
2. Why did God liberate Israel from their slavery?
3. How does the Church, saved by the blood of Christ, become a priestly people and a worshipping community?
4. The Sacrifice of the Holy Qurbana is the highest form of worship: Explain.
5. As a priestly people of God in the New Testament, how are we to exercise our ministry of common priesthood?