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## ***Priesthood of Believers***

***By: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio***



When people meet me and find out that I'm a Catholic theologian, it does not take long before they pop the question: "why doesn't the Catholic Church let women and married men be priests?"



Now the fun begins. "There must be some mistake," I respond. "The Catholic Church has had female and married priests from the very beginning."

That is usually met with a blank, perplexed stare.

But really, it is true. In Exodus 19:6 God promises to make the chosen people "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." The first letter of Peter 2:5-10 echoes this. And to show how seriously the Catholic Church takes this, the sacrament of confirmation offers to all Catholics an anointing with the sacred chrism that is used to confer only one other sacrament—the ordination of bishops and priests.

This is not to blur the distinction between the ***ministerial priesthood*** and ***the priesthood of all believers***.

The concept of priesthood implies the notion of sacrifice. And only the priest who receives the sacrament of holy orders is authorized and empowered to stand in the person of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice and repeat the words he uttered over the bread and wine the night before he died. Only the ministerial priest consecrates bread and wine and transforms them into the body and blood of Christ.



So what sacrifice does the priesthood of the laity offer? What do we lay "priests" consecrate?

St. Paul answers the first question in Romans 12:2: "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship." As the Lord Jesus offered himself totally for our sake, we are called to lay down our lives for Him and for one another. In rare occasions, this may mean the "supreme sacrifice" of martyrdom. But more commonly, it means the living sacrifice, the "white martyrdom," of denying our own

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will to embrace His will, “offering up” in love the work we do and the trials we endure, as a sacrifice of praise of God and intercession for others in need. Studying for exams, changing a soiled diaper, going to work to provide for our families--these are all activities that become opportunities for Christians to exercise their sacred priesthood. In fact during the Sunday Eucharist, as the bread and wine are carried up to the altar, we are called to consciously place ourselves and all sacrifices of the past week on the altar with the gifts to be united with Christ’s perfect sacrifice to the Father.



So what do we lay “priests” consecrate? Vatican II gives us the answer to that question in its [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity](#). We are called to consecrate the secular, the earthy, the nitty-gritty realities of life to God. When we give thanks over a meal, we consecrate it to God’s glory and sanctify it. When we offer our work in sacrifice, and live out our Christian witness in the workplace, we consecrate our work and sanctify it. We lay priests are to be God’s secret agents in every arena of life, in places where ministerial priests and religious may never go, elevating, purifying, sanctifying, blessing.

Without the pastoral care and sacramental ministry of ordained priests and bishops, we lay “priests” would never have the spiritual wherewithal to live out this challenging call.

So yes, by all means, praying for God to send laborers to the harvest entails praying for an increase of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life. And we need to put our children and teens in contact with holy priests and religious who are joyfully and fruitfully living out their vocation, so that it might be easier for the young to hear God calling should they have such a vocation.

But praying for laborers for the harvest also means to pray that more and more of those priests consecrated through baptism and confirmation would answer the awesome call that they’ve received to transform themselves and all creation through the sacrificial love of Christ poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit.



This was originally published in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection upon the readings for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle A (Ex 19:2-6A, Ps. 100:1-5, Ro 5:6-11; Mt 9:36-10:8). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.

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*by: Marcellino D’Ambrosio*



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