



Young Adult Discussion Guide

"You are a Priest Forever" Psalm 110

Purpose:

The Second Vatican Council, in its decree 'On the Apostolate of the Laity,' offers a clear distinction between the ministry of priests and the apostolates of the laity. These two dimensions of life within the Catholic Church are meant to be mutually enriching of one another, but yet the Council Fathers also had clearly identified roles that belonged in each dimension. This guide is meant to help clarify these dimensions, as outlined in the Council documents, and to help young adults of today implement and embrace the mission they have been given by the Council, in support of their priests.

Resources:

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity can be found here:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html

The Decree on the Ministry of Priests can be found here:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html

See also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 871-945 on 'Christ's Faithful – Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life:

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p123a9p4.htm>

The above links can also be found here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/vatican2.htm>

Discussion Points

The 'economy of salvation' is the Church's understanding of how the salvation wrought by Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension is merited out through the Church to the individual believer. This understanding has been developed over the centuries as theologians have reflected upon the 'Christ event,' as well as the commission which Jesus gave to the Twelve at the end of His public ministry: "Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

United with the Commissioning of Peter, we see Jesus passing along the authority that he had been given by His Father in Heaven onto the Twelve. The Twelve, in turn, pass their authority, through the laying on of hands, to the Bishops, their descendants, in Apostolic Succession. The Bishops, in turn,

share their authority with the priests, who then pass it along to the laity, all with the goal of bringing souls to Christ. This is the Church's mission: to bring about salvation of souls.

In order to accomplish this mission, Christ established a hierarchy within the Church, each segment of which has its own responsibility to accomplish the overall task of salvation:

- 1) "Christ is himself the source of the ministry in the Church. He instituted the Church, He gave her authority and mission, orientation and goal." (CCC 874)
- 2) In order to accomplish this goal, Jesus works through the headship of the pope, united with the college of bishops.
 - a. The pope continues the primacy given to Peter by Christ near the headwaters of the River Jordan, near Caesarea Philippi.
 - b. The college of bishops, as a whole, can gather in an Ecumenical Council, but only with the authority, or at least the recognition, of the pope.
 - c. Individually, the bishops represent the universality and variety of the People of God; as well as the unity of the Church, assembled under the headship of the pope.
- 3) The office of bishop, and by extension to his priest co-workers, follows a three-fold dimension:
 - a. Teaching:
 - i. They are commissioned to teach in the name of the Christ, for "the mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error." (CCC 890)
 - b. Sanctifying:
 - i. Through Holy Orders, the bishop becomes the steward of the grace found in the supreme priesthood, especially through the Eucharist, the source and summit of Catholic life. He, along with His priests, do this through their prayer and work, by their ministry of word and sacraments. Also, their example of giving their lives for the sake of their brothers and sisters in Christ helps to bring about the sanctity in the Church.
 - c. Governing:
 - i. The bishops govern the particular Churches placed in their care by counsel, exhortation and example. They are responsible for all the souls in their particular Church, and for ordering the structure of the Church and the world to help bring about the salvation wrought by Christ.
- 4) The role of the clergy, as outlined above, is to build up the Body of Christ so that it may be a leaven in the world, a light set on a hill. These men have been given a specific and unique mission to lay down their lives and to be conduits of grace for Catholics, so that the lay faithful may be more configured to Christ as well. But, it is not up to the clergy alone.
- 5) The lay faithful, by reason of their special vocation, are to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They are to take the knowledge and wisdom gained through their own discipleship of Christ and bring it to the world, to be the leaven in the world, calling all to repentance and conversion.
- 6) By virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, Christ's lay faithful also have a share in His priestly, prophetic and governing role.
 - a. Sanctifying:
 - i. The lay faithful are called to consecrate the world itself to God. By bringing with them the graces they have received through their prayerful reception of the Eucharist and the Sacraments, they are to offer spiritual sacrifices by the example of the holiness of their lives.
 - b. Teaching:

- i. "Lay people... fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, 'that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.' For lay people, 'this evangelization... acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world.'" (CCC 905, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 35)
- c. Governing:
 - i. The Laity, by virtue of their living and working out in the world, are called to order the secular world by the principals of the Gospel. By striving for virtue in their daily life, they 'will impregnate culture and human works with a moral value.' (CCC 909)
 - ii. The laity can be called to share in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority through sharing in the mission and ministry of priests; nevertheless, their proper sphere of influence is, in fact, out in the midst of the world.

In examining the two 'spheres of influence' discussed above, we see a complimentary in the life of the Church between the lay faithful and the priesthood: each gives life to the other.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) While the Bishop and the priest have the official roles in teaching the faith, what are ways that you can teach others the importance of the faith?
- 2) How does the ministry of the priest help you as a lay Catholic make Jesus Christ present to your world?
- 3) What are ways that you can help the priest govern the parish so that the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the entire world can be fulfilled?
- 4) What are specific ways you can support your pastor in his mission?
- 5) How does it help you as a lay Catholic to know a priest is available to you to answer your questions, respond in a time of need, or challenge you to live your faith to its fullness?