

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: December 2017

My Resource-of-the-Month: Catholic Answers (Catholic.com)

Information on the "Priesthood" → <https://www.catholic.com/priesthood>

Information on "Women Priests" → <https://www.catholic.com/women-priests>

True Feminism, Part 7: Women and the Priesthood

In part one of this series on feminism, I spoke of the God-given gift of womanhood and of motherhood. In part two, I looked at abortion and contraception as two main fruits of the movement of radical feminism, attacking authentic womanhood. In part three, I wrote of the relationship between men and women according to God's design, as revealed in Sacred Scripture. I expanded on this idea in part four, where I looked at God's plan in terms of the functions of men and women in marriage and in the life of the family. I then went even broader in parts 5 and 6, commenting on the specific God-given gifts of men and women and how these relate to our vocations in our society and the world.

I will end the calendar year, and this commentary on true feminism, discussing the emotionally charged topic of women and the priesthood. Why emotionally charged? Because women have been wounded. We have experienced systemic sexism, we have been mistreated and we have had to fight for what should be ours by our very virtue of being human, equal rights.

Some feel that the ordination of women is a topic up for debate; for many, it is felt that the Church will one day "get with the times" and things will change. However, I can say quite confidently that the Catholic Church will never ordain women (validly). The Catholic Church teaches that it does not have the authority to ordain women, for a number of reasons. Saint John Paul 2 confirmed and highlighted this teaching in 1992 when he wrote:

"Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis)."

Woah! So in order to remain faithful, we must all accept that women cannot be priests. But isn't this unfair? Why should women be denied the priesthood simply because they are women? Isn't this sexism? No. It isn't. But I certainly sympathize with those who feel this way, because this used to be me.

I felt that the fact that women were excluded from the priesthood was a deep personal insult to me as a female. I thought that it meant that I wasn't good enough or that, as a woman, I was somehow inferior to men. This is something I struggled to understand and something that caused my heart a lot of grief, to say the least.

So, I did what I do when I don't understand, I turned again to God in prayer. I asked Him for understanding and for the grace to accept the Truth. I promised Him that I would teach others the Truth, but that I needed to be convinced of what that is, so that I could teach it with integrity and with conviction. Well, God answered my prayer yet again and I will now make good on my promise and share with you what I've learned.

What is the priesthood?

In order to understand why women cannot be priests, we need to first understand what a priest is.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Intrinsically linked to the sacramental nature of ecclesial ministry is its character as service. Entirely dependent on Christ who gives mission and authority, ministers are truly 'slaves of Christ,' in

the image of him who freely took ‘the form of a slave’ for us. Because the word and grace of which they are ministers are not their own, but are given to them by Christ for the sake of others, they must freely become the slaves of all (CCC 392-394).”

While the Church is a ranked institution, similar to a Kingdom, it is also the Body of Christ, and is composed of all who believe. It is important to note that, “Although the Church possesses a ‘hierarchical’ structure, nevertheless this structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members (Mulieris Dignitatem).” In other words, the priesthood is a spiritual servitude, bestowed upon those chosen by God for the good of His children.

You may at this point be wondering, “Isn’t Jesus the one true priest?” He is. But, it is important to understand the ministerial priesthood as it relates to Jesus Christ. I cannot explain this better than is done in the Catechism...

“Everything that the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the ‘one mediator between God and men.’ The Christian tradition considers Melchizedek, ‘priest of God Most High,’ as a prefiguration of the priesthood of Christ, the unique ‘high priest after the order of Melchizedek’; ‘holy, blameless, unstained,’ ‘by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified,’ that is, by the unique sacrifice of the cross. The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once for all; yet it is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The same is true of the one priesthood of Christ; it is made present through the ministerial priesthood without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ’s priesthood: ‘Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers’ (CCC 1544-1545).”

In other words, Jesus is the one true priest, and acts through His ministerial priests on earth. This explains why Jesus chose to leave us, His children, a priesthood. And I thank God for His priests, for without them I would not be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist or God’s forgiveness in the healing Sacrament of Confession!

However, at this point you may be asking, “Why can’t these ministerial priests be women?” Good question. This brings me to my next topic.

Jesus Chose Male Apostles:

Jesus chose the twelve Apostles and they were all men. These men were the first bishops of the Church. When more priests were needed to serve the growing Church, these bishops ordained more men. They also appointed men to succeed them as bishops. These are historical facts.

Saint John Paul 2 (JP2) explains this citing sacred scripture: “In fact the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles attest that this call was made in accordance with God’s eternal plan; Christ chose those whom he willed (cf. Mk 3:13-14; Jn 6:70), and he did so in union with the Father, “through the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:2), after having spent the night in prayer (cf. Lk 6:12). Therefore, in granting admission to the ministerial priesthood, the Church has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord’s way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church (cf. Rv 21:14). These men did not in fact receive only a function, which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. Mt 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15). The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers who would succeed them in their ministry (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis).”

When I first heard this argument, I thought that Jesus’ decision to choose only men was probably a reflection of the state of women at the time. The more I thought about this, however, the more I realized that this made absolutely no sense.

Jesus was not afraid of contradicting the customs and traditions of the time. There are many examples of this in the Bible. JP2 emphasizes this fact in his apostolic letter writing, “Christ became a promoter of women’s true dignity and of the vocation corresponding to this dignity. At times this caused wonder, surprise, often to the point of scandal, because this behaviour differed from that of his contemporaries.” He also notes that, “In all of Jesus’ teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day (Mulieris Dignitatem).”

It would be absurd to think that Jesus would have participated in discrimination against women! I have also recently learned that priestesses existed in all of the pagan religions of the time. These priestesses held the same prestige as their male counterparts. Judaism and Christianity were set apart in that they were the only religions offering a uniquely male priesthood. Interesting! This shows us that there must be a good reason Jesus chose only male ministers.

So what's the deal? Why DID Jesus choose male Apostles? JP2 wrote in his *Letter to Women* that "In [the] perspective of 'service' - which, when it is carried out with freedom, reciprocity and love, expresses the truly 'royal' nature of mankind - one can also appreciate that the presence of a certain diversity of roles is in no way prejudicial to women, provided that this diversity is not the result of an arbitrary imposition, but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female."

So this means Jesus' decision directly relates to what it truly means to be man and woman, as the priesthood is necessarily masculine, a fatherhood.

"In Persona Christi"

Jesus was a man, and as His ministerial priests act on behalf of Him (the one true priest), it is necessary that they also be men. The Catechism explains, "In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts in persona Christi Capitis (CCC 1548)."

Simplified, this means that priests act in the person of Christ. Jesus' ministerial priests offer their bodies in service to Jesus and Jesus acts through them. When a priest consecrates the Eucharist, forgives sins or confers any of the Sacraments, it is not he that is accomplishing all this; it is Jesus who does it through His ministerial priest (His representative). This concept is illustrated in the Book of Matthew (see Matthew 8:6-13).

That is why, as Catholics, we understand that it is Jesus speaking when we hear "This is my body," at the time of consecration. Jesus is speaking through His priest. Jesus is accomplishing the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into His Body and Blood. This is why Jesus' minister must be a man.

"It is the Eucharist above all that expresses the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards the Church the Bride. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts 'in persona Christi,' is performed by a man (*Mulieris Dignitatem*)."

Does this mean that women are inferior? Not at all! Does this mean that men are more worthy? No. In fact, the Catechism explains that, "Since it is ultimately Christ who acts and effects salvation through the ordained minister, the unworthiness of the latter does not prevent Christ from acting. St. Augustine states this forcefully: As for the proud minister, he is to be ranked with the devil. Christ's gift is not thereby profaned: what flows through him keeps its purity, and what passes through him remains dear and reaches the fertile earth. . . . The spiritual power of the sacrament is indeed comparable to light: those to be enlightened receive it in its purity, and if it should pass through defiled beings, it is not itself defiled (CCC 1584)."

We can be assured, therefore, that men are not superior to women due to the fact that Jesus was a man and therefore chose men (who are unworthy) to represent Him. We can also be assured, due to Jesus' power and will, that the Sacraments remain valid, even if these ministers are severely flawed and sinful human beings.

JP2, in his *Letter to Women*, specifies: "If Christ - by his free and sovereign choice, clearly attested to by the Gospel and by the Church's constant Tradition - entrusted only to men the task of being an 'icon' of his countenance as 'shepherd' and 'bridegroom' of the Church through the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, this in no way detracts from the role of women, or for that matter from the role of the other members of the Church who are not ordained to the sacred ministry, since all share equally in the dignity proper to the 'common priesthood' based on Baptism."

The Common Priesthood:

Wait... we're all priests? Yes, but we need to distinguish the difference between the ordinary priesthood and the ministerial priesthood.

JP2 clarifies, "In the New Covenant there is only one sacrifice and only one priest; Christ. All the baptized share in the one priesthood of Christ [ordinary priesthood], both men and women, inasmuch as they must 'present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom12:1), give witness to Christ in every place, and give an explanation to anyone who asks the reason for the hope of eternal life that is in them (1 Pt 3:15)' (Mulieris Dignitatem)."

Therefore all of the baptized share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. "All in the church are a 'kingdom of priests' (Rev 5:10, 1Pt 2:9)." This is the ordinary priesthood, and we participate in this priesthood when we serve others in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Through our common priesthood we, the laity, are invaluable in the work of the worldwide Church.

"Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it (CCC 900)."

Thus both the common and the ministerial priesthoods are needed, and they support each other in a shared mission: the salvation of souls. There is a difference between the two that must be acknowledged, however. Noteworthy is the fact that the Apostles alone are told "Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24)." And "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained' (John 20:23)." It was Jesus who called for ministerial priests to serve as His representatives, conferring the Sacraments.

Women and the Church:

So what does this mean in terms of the role of women in Christ's Church? It is important to remember that equality doesn't always mean sameness. Women cannot be priests because the Christian priesthood instituted by God is masculine, as He is masculine, and fatherly, as He is our Father. This is in no way discriminatory.

As has already been discussed in my previous true feminism commentaries, men and women are different, but each are made in the image and likeness of God with an equal dignity. Women have been given an extraordinary gift from God, which is not only biological, but spiritual as well. It is a part of her very being, body and soul. She is able to cooperate with God to bring forth life and this is reflected in the many charisms that make up her feminine genius.

Men cannot bear children and we have never considered this discrimination... perhaps because feminism (and other "isms") has demolished the true identity of men and women. False feminism has deemed women's gift a "curse" and a "burden." False feminism tells women that we need to be emancipated from this gift and be more like men.

But Christianity offers a better solution for women... a true feminism. This true feminism recognizes her gift and celebrates it! Through Christianity women are truly free. God's greatest creation, His masterpiece, is a woman. This woman carried God in her womb! She is the Mother of God! Through her "fiat," her YES to God, we have been saved! There is no greater honour than this! I am proud to share womanhood with this extraordinary Mother, the Virgin Mary!

JP2 says it best: "the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis)."

In Conclusion:

Always be reminded that the hierarchy of the Church was instituted for our good; it is ordered toward the sanctity of its members. This means that everything has been put into place for the benefit of souls, to help us achieve salvation. Priests are therefore the ministers of God who serve the faithful (Christ's Body, the Church) through the Sacraments. Saint John Paul 2 explains, "The ministerial priesthood, according to God's plan, 'is an expression not of domination but of service' (Letter to Women)."

Priests are not superior to the rest of us, simply because they are priests. We should remember that, "The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis)," those who loved the most. Love is the key!

Women are therefore indispensable to the Church. We have a tremendous power to influence those who love us. We are the mothers (spiritual or biological) of all God's priests, ordinary and ministerial. In fact, JP2 says that "In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root."

As the Declaration Inter Insigniores points out, "the Church desires that Christian women should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the Church."

I truly think that if we were to recognize the awesomeness that is womanhood and motherhood (that's right, awesomeness!), an all male-priesthood would cease to be a controversy.

My Resource-of-the-Month is the Catholic Answers website. The resources provided on this website and the expertise of the apologists giving "Catholic Answers" to my burning questions really helped lead me to the Truth. It is a truly amazing resource. If you are searching for understanding, don't give up. Pray about it and use Catholic Answers as a starting point in your search. I would also invite you to have a look at the sections of our website dedicated to the priesthood (The Chair of Peter) and feminism (Women and Feminism). I encourage you to read the documents on Church teaching that I've quoted and listed below as well. I can summarize what I've learned for you, but only the grace of the Holy Spirit can make this information pierce your heart and provide you with peace. If you cry out for understanding, God will hear you and answer you, in His time.

By the grace of God, I now know the incredible dignity and worth that is mine. I am a precious child of God (you are too!) and the fact that the Church does not have the authority (only Jesus does) to ordain me a priest is now a non-issue for me. I want what God wants for me, because He knows what is best. I also don't feel cheated or deprived of anything. As a woman, I can be a spiritual mother, a prophetess, a saint, or a doctor of the Church if God wills it! I can show others the love that God has shown me! I don't want anything more. I want God's will for my life. Thanks be to God!

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jocelyne". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name.

Jocelyne

Quoted

“Mulieris Dignitatem” By Saint Pope John Paul 2

Vatican Link → https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_29061995_women.html

“Letter to Women” By Pope Saint John Paul 2

Vatican Link → http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html

“Catechism of the Catholic Church”

Vatican Link → http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGLISH/_INDEX.HTM

“Apostolic Letter Ordinatio Sacerdotalis” By Pope Saint John Paul 2

(to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone)

Vatican Link → https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html

“Declaration Inter Insigniores”

(on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood)

Vatican Link → http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html