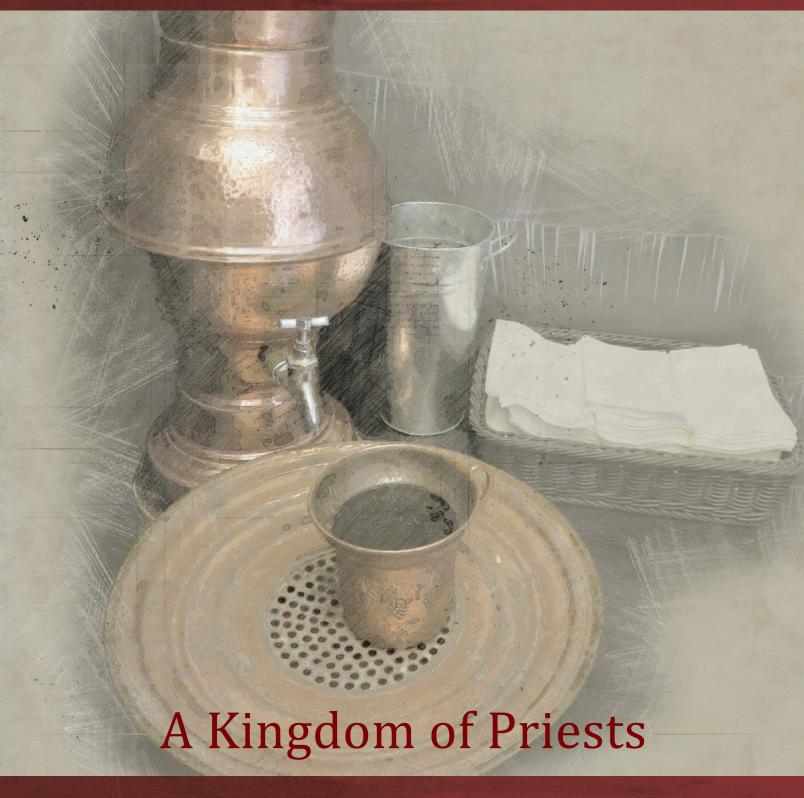
Session Four



Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

KEY SCRIPTURE



The priest's office shall be theirs by perpetual statute. Thus you shall ordain them. "

- Exodus 29:9



Circle the words "office" and "perpetual" in the Key Scripture verse to the left. We will come back to this later in the session.

STEP 1: PREPARATION HOME

Through the very existence of the Tabernacle, God communicated his desire for worship, but not just any worship. Proper worship for the people of God would be liturgical, and all the rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices that would be offered in the Tabernacle on behalf of the people would require a special representative of God: the priest.

OLD TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD

Moses, as God's prophet, would ordain and anoint the first priests according to God's command. Far from simply serviceable or strictly utilitarian, everything about the priesthood was minutely specified by God himself in lavish detail—the recipe for the precious, fragrant anointing oil; directions for specific offerings; rubrics for the elaborate ceremonies; and the elaborately decorated vestments. **Exodus 28:2** tells us about God's intentions for the priesthood in the context of making his choice of the first priests known. What does this reveal about how God views the priesthood?

Moses' brother Aaron, who had spoken to Pharaoh on Moses' behalf due to a speech impediment, was selected by God as the first priest, as were his sons after him. Thereafter, the high priestly line would be by physical descendance. Before Moses had even left Mount Sinai with God's directions, the first crisis of the priesthood occurred at the foot of the mountain. Read through **Exodus 32.** What was the crisis?

The terrifying spectacle into which Moses disappeared in **Exodus** 20:18-21 and his forty days on the mountain in Exodus 24:16-18 led the people to think he might never return. Apparently, Aaron In the Bible,

rebellion

against

the priesthood in dissension, division, and correction.

had given up all hope as well. From this infamous event forward, the priesthood would come from the Levite tribe rather than every family's firstborn (see Exodus 13:11-16).

Read through **Leviticus 10** as though you are one of the priests. What are your thoughts?

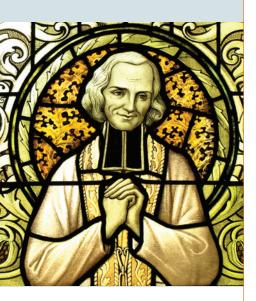


4 Why do you think God placed so much seriousness on the sacredness and detail of these seemingly insignificant duties and responsibilities?

After God, the priest is everything.

— St. John Vianney

Does it surprise you that the very first priests under God's direct instruction were so flawed? What does that say about your expectations of your own priest?



Sirach 45 presents the priesthood to us in as elevated a style as God intended. He is called the "leader of the sanctuary" (Sirach 45:24), and Scripture offers a convenient synopsis of the functions of the priesthood. Jot down the three primary duties of the priest listed in **Sirach 45:15-17.**

The priest's duties centered on care of the Tabernacle, hearing the confessions of the people and offering sacrifices for them, and officiating at the liturgical feasts. These are the duties of any priest, and they were described in great detail in the Pentateuch. But there was another priesthood! Sort of.

The Common Priesthood

Exodus 19:3-6 shows us "another" priesthood:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel ... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

All the people of Israel were to be a kingdom of priests. As a non-Catholic, I was very familiar with these verses, but I had never been exposed to a single Catholic priest, ever. So my understanding of the Key Scripture for this session was simply the "lay priesthood," and that is the only understanding that I and my denomination ever considered. This is easier to see when you combine it with 1 Peter 2:5, 9:

And like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Did you notice the term "spiritual house"? That means a holy tabernacle or temple. You and I, as we explored in Session One, are chosen, living stones that construct a tabernacle for God to live in.

But we do not just form the structure of that tabernacle and worship in it on a daily, weekly, and yearly liturgical schedule; we also minister in it as a holy and royal priesthood. This idea is sometimes called the "common priesthood" or the "priesthood of the believer." As a non-Catholic, I heard repeated references to these passages in attacks on pastoral authority. However, side-stepping the authority of God's institutional priesthood is convenient, but it is not biblical.

Numbers 16–17 give us the whole sordid story. Read through both chapters now.

The people's specific argument was about the authority of Aaron's priesthood, the institutional priesthood. God had given the people their own role in the service of the Tabernacle, but they were not satisfied with the common priesthood. The people used God's own words (see again Exodus 19:6, above) as justification for claiming equal authority and responsibility with the institutional priesthood. Because God had said they were all a "kingdom of priests," the people felt the institutional priesthood was unnecessary.



Because there is no institutional priesthood in Protestant churches, pastoral authority (if it exists at all) is symbolic. But look at whose authority and leadership God regarded Israel's complaining and rebellion to be against in **Numbers 16:8-11**.

It was the Lord himself they offended by complaining against and attacking the authority of the priesthood, and he was happy to clear up the controversy. To satisfy the issue of legitimate authority, God publicly affirmed his institutional priesthood in a remarkable way.

The Institutional Priesthood

Read through Numbers 17. In verses 1-3, what did God command the leaders of each tribe to do with their rods?

These people were shepherds. Their rods were basically walking sticks, or shepherd's staffs, but they were also a sign of tribal authority so that the staff of a tribe leader was the emblem of his tribe or "flock." In the Catholic Church, this is the bishop's staff (or *crozier*).

The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was where God's presence rested in the cloud. God wanted the staffs brought to him. What was supposed to happen to the tribal staff, a dead stick, that belonged to the man God had chosen as the father of the priesthood?

Whose rod came alive to bud?



10 It not only had leaves, but also ripe almonds (eight)! A stick that was dead one day sprouted living flowers and ripe almonds the next! God turned Aaron's ordinary shepherd's staff into a rod to rule the people. Then, just to emphasize the point, the Lord commanded the other leaders to take back their dead staffs from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle to show their submission to God's selection. How serious do you think God is about priestly authority?



Aaron's rod, living, budded, and fruited with almonds, was to be kept within the Ark inside the Tabernacle as a continual confirmation to the rebellious that God desired a living, fruitful, perpetual, institutional priesthood that would keep "watch" over his people. St. Paul tells us in Romans 13:1-2:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

During a particularly contentious and difficult set of circumstances regarding pastoral authority, God used the Old Testament conflict over the priesthood and St. Paul's warning to teach me about responsible obedience, and that resisting authority is really resisting God himself. I realized I should refrain from speaking negatively about my church leaders. I could talk to God about my complaints. I could even go to the pastor himself and whatever other avenues of authority there were—all of them if necessary and prudent. We talk about difficult, poor, and even immoral priests in the Fulfilled book, and what to do about them. But to refuse or resist their authority, gossip about them, or try to undermine them is a sin. In fact, rebellion was the sin of Satan.

Where there must also be an institutional priesthood.

The Catholic priesthood does not offend Jesus' priesthoodit gives witness to it.



JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST

The reason that priests' authority is indisputable is because they act in persona Christi. In **Hebrews 3:1, 5-6**, the Bible says something wonderful about Christ:

Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession ... Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.

Jesus is the new Moses, our new, eternal apostle and High Priest. Moses was faithful in God's Old Testament "house," the Tabernacle. Jesus is also faithful to God's "house." He fulfills the office of Prophet, Priest, and Apostle.

But please notice that Jesus' apostleship and priesthood did not in any way prevent the apostleship or priesthood of the twelve disciples whom he called and ordained to succeed him on earth. In fact, where there is a High Priest, there must also be other priests.

PRIESTHOOD IN THE CHURCH

What is your idea of what it means to be a priest?

To be a priest means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. But its strict meaning, its original meaning, is a person who has the authority to represent a group in offering sacrifice to God for group worship. Jesus understood and followed this meaning.

We know, in part, that Jesus meant to establish a new priestly system through the twelve apostles because he gave them a sacrifice to offer on behalf of others.

- In **Luke 22:19-20**, we see Jesus instituting the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Jesus authorizes the disciples to perform the primary function of the priesthood: sacrifice. What will they sacrifice?
- 13 How does St. Paul confirm that the priestly sacrifice is truly Jesus' own Body and Blood in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29?

St. Paul reminds us of Jesus' own words of consecration. Then he stresses the importance of understanding that Jesus' real Body is sacrificed at Mass and offered by the priest in a mystical, unbloody way: This is what we receive when we receive the Eucharist; this is what makes the Catholic priesthood so necessary and beautiful. Catholic priests offer a group sacrifice for group worship.

THE OFFICE OF PRIESTHOOD

Take a look back at the Key Scripture on page 34 where you circled the word *office*. An office is a position in an organization with specific duties attached to it. The position stays intact while the people who occupy it change.

The office that Judas held and vacated by his suicide had to be filled after his death:

For it is written in the book of Psalms, "Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it"; and "His office let another take" (Acts 1:20)

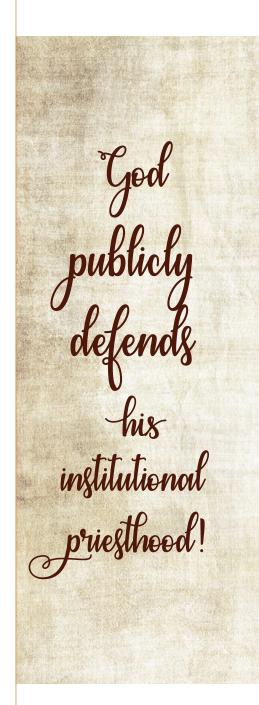
Because Judas was an apostle, he had an office. It was the office of the priesthood. Take a look back at the Key Scripture. What meaning does it hold for you now?

As a non-Catholic with authority problems, I had been corrected by God on the issue of authority with a biblical account of a dispute over the priesthood. As soon as I learned what the Bible teaches about the Eucharist, I knew immediately that an institutional priesthood was absolutely necessary for the true biblical Church, in addition to the common priesthood all believers share as a result of their baptism.

NEW TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD

Recall that a fruited almond branch confirmed God's desire for a formal priesthood, apart from the lay priesthood. Did you know the word for "almond" in Hebrew is from the root meaning "to remain" or "to watch"?

Besides offering the Eucharistic sacrifice on our behalf, our Church's priesthood does something else that is very important and providential.





Hebrews 13:17 reads, "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account."

Our New Testament priests and bishops keep watch over our souls, just like the Old Testament almond branch illustrated. They will be required to give an account to God for our souls and how they cared for them. Like all authority, God gives us Church leadership for order and protection. Authority, leadership, and priesthood are God's idea!

Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church "a kingdom, priests for his God and Father." The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are "consecrated to be ... a holy priesthood" (CCC 1546).

LET'S REVIEW

This is why the Catholic Church has a priesthood:

- Through the Old Testament Tabernacle, God communicated his desire to be served by both an ordained and a lay priesthood.
- God did not change his mind about the ordained priesthood:
 "For I the LORD do not change" (Malachi 3:6). In him, "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). The Old Testament priesthood was not eliminated, but "changed" to include the saving grace of Jesus (Hebrews 7:11-19).
- The Old Testament priesthood was fulfilled in Jesus as our High Priest (Hebrews 7:19).
- Ezekiel's prophecy of the messianic Temple includes both the ordained and the lay priesthood; therefore, the Church must also include both (see Ezekiel 44 and the session's video).
- Through his body, the Church, Jesus brings the perpetuity of office required of the ordained priesthood forward into the Church, just as he does the lay priesthood in us.
- We cannot live in the closest possible relationship to God if our worship does not include both the ordained and lay priesthood.

YOU ARE NOW READY FOR THE SESSION FOUR VIDEO.

¹ Rev 1:6; cf. Rev 5:9-10; 1 Pet 2:5, 9.

² LG 10 § 1

STEP 2: VIDEO PRESENTATION

Session Four: A Kingdom of Priests

- Review of the history of the book of Ezekiel
- Prophecy of new messianic Temple
- Historical context of the kingdom split the Great Apostasy
- 2 Chronicles 11:153: "And he made to himself priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made."
- 1 Kings 12
- The priesthood as unifier and preservative of faith
- Application: Temptations to disunity in the Church and in my life are satanic and a strategy of the devil for confusion. Unity is a sign of God's presence and a mark of Jesus' prayer in John 17.

Douay-Rheims Bible, http://www.drbo.org/chapter/14011.htm.

STEP 3: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

INVITATION

In the Old Testament, God revealed his desire for perpetual liturgical worship facilitated by an institutional priesthood. While the Old Testament priesthood was interrupted by death and ended with the eternal high priesthood of Jesus, his priesthood is carried forth into the world in New Testament history through the priesthood of the Catholic Church.

The duty of a priest is to offer sacrifice. Although the common priesthood of all the baptized differs from the ordained priesthood, all are called to offer sacrifices to God. We do this by giving due diligence to the duties of our vocation in life and by "offering up" our own daily sacrifices in union with Christ's perfect, all-redemptive sacrifice. This is especially appropriate in the Mass, where Jesus makes his eternal sacrifice present to us and we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God.

'	Notes

God Prompt - LOVE the Word™



LISTEN: "Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:5-9).



OBSERVE: What habit(s) do you allow that prevent you from fully serving or sacrificing for God as you desire?

Have you ever been guilty of murmuring against your local priest or against Church leadership?

What has God taught us about this during this session?



VERBALIZE: Lord, the most meaningful passage of Scripture through which you spoke to

Lord, I believe that in response to today's study, you want me to ...

As I think about my relationship to the priesthood and with priests I have known ...

I need your help to ...



ENTRUST: O Jesus, I pray for more faithful and fervent priests; for your unfaithful and tepid priests; for your priests laboring at home or abroad in distant mission fields; for your tempted priests; for your lonely and desolate priests; for your young priests; for your dying priests; for the souls of your priests in purgatory. But above all, I recommend to you the priests dearest to me: the priest who baptized me; the priests who absolved me from my sins; the priests at whose Masses I assisted and who gave me your Body and Blood in Holy Communion; the priests who taught and instructed me; all the priests to whom I am indebted in any other way (especially ...). O Jesus, keep them all close to your heart and bless them abundantly in time and in eternity. Amen.

"Daily Prayer for Priests," St. Thérèse of Lisieux