



PRIESTHOOD

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." – JOHN 15:5

OPENING ACTIVITY

FUNNY ALTAR SERVER

1. Watch "Altar Serving" by Max Weber.
2. Do you have any good stories about altar serving?



ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS

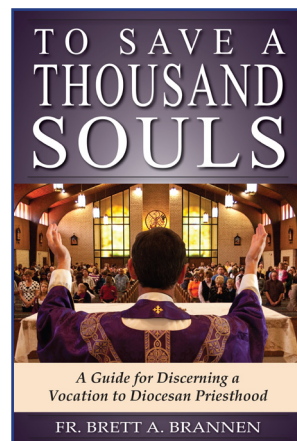
THE SACRED POWER OF PRIESTHOOD

Excerpts from To Save a Thousand Souls, by Fr. Brett Brannen

Why do You Call Them Priests?

While I was in college, I was once asked by a devout evangelical Christian, "Why do you call your pastors "priests" in the Catholic Church? In my church, we call them ministers or preachers." I answered the question of this sincere student by pointing him to the Old Testament, where the men of the tribe of Levi were called "priests." But he pointed out in reply, "Those men offered sacrifices of bulls and goats to God again and again for the forgiveness of the people's sins. That is why they were called priests. But that Levitical priesthood was not sufficient for the forgiveness of sins; that is why Christ had to come." I was impressed with his answer. I replied, "Catholic priests also offer sacrifice. Every time we celebrate Mass we offer the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, wherein he died two thousand years ago and rose from the dead. Catholics believe that the Mass is the perpetuation in time of the one eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ."

Now that young evangelical Christian raised his eyebrows and shook his head. He said, "Well, I don't believe what you believe – that the Mass is the sacrifice of Christ. But now I do understand why you would call your ministers "priests."



This book by Fr. Brett Brannen explains how to discern if God is calling you to be a priest.



ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS *continued*

A Sacred Power

Fr. John Cihak tells this true story that happened to him some years ago when he was studying in Rome.

“Last spring a brother priest came to the Casa [a house for the training of young priests] to train for the ministry of exorcism in his diocese. He asked me at the breakfast table one morning to accompany him to a church in the city to observe the work of one of Rome’s exorcists. The priest wanted help translating from Italian so that he could better understand the exorcist’s extemporaneous words, and the words being hissed or shouted at him. That morning was an extraordinary experience in which my own priestly identity was deepened. About twenty minutes into the session, the exorcist asked the five priests in the room to raise their hands from a distance in a type of epiclesis and to quietly invoke the Holy Spirit over the victim. The reaction was strong. The demons cursed, writhed, begged, raged, whimpered and threatened. A low, sinister voice cried out again and again, “Get them off! You are burning me!” To the demons the hands of a priest seared as though on fire, yet to the victim those same hands soothed as though still wet from holy chrism. The demons were painfully aware of a reality to which we are often blind: these hands are configured to those of the incarnate Son of God. They are His hands. Our chrismed, burning hands reveal the hidden depths of the priesthood He has given us. They remind us of who we are.”



photo by Stephen Golder

Ordination to priesthood is not just an initiation, like joining a club or a fraternity. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit which permits the exercise of a sacred power (*sacra potestas*) which comes from Jesus Christ himself through his Church. The hands of an ordained priest have a sacred power to offer the sacrifice of Christ and to forgive sins in the sacraments (CCC #1537-8). Priesthood is not just being a preacher and a minister, though priests certainly do preach and minister to God’s people. It is the administering of a sacred power!

The demons know this even better than we do.

In Persona Christi Capitas

The priesthood brings the very power of Jesus down to earth out of love and mercy for his people.

A priest, by virtue of his ordination and the sacred power entrusted to him, acts *in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Christ, the head of the Church. Catholics know this is true and witness it daily. For example, when a priest baptizes a baby, he says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” He does not say, “Jesus baptizes you...” At Holy Mass, the priest says in the first person, “This is my body, which is given up for you. Do this in memory of me.” And in Confession, does the priest say “Jesus absolves you of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?” Of course not. The priest says, “I absolve you of your sins...” A priest functions and exists *in persona Christi capitis*. It is really Jesus who is baptizing. It is Jesus who is offering himself in the Mass. It is Jesus who is forgiving sins in Confession. It is the raised hand of Jesus expelling demons from a possessed man. But it is his priest who is saying the words, acting in the very person of Christ (CCC #1548).



A priest acts “in persona Christi capitis” in the person of Christ, the head of the Church.

This identification with Christ is so strong that the Church traditionally calls her ordained priests *alter Christus* (other Christs). When St. Paul writes in Galatians: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me (2:20),” this is certainly true for all the baptized faithful. But when applied to an ordained Catholic priest, this passage takes on a new meaning entirely.

The priesthood is about serving others and getting them to heaven. Jesus imparts this sacred power to a priest for the sake of others.

Be Curious

What passages from these readings stand out to you?

What is the power a priest has?

What is the most important thing happening at Mass?

Explain in your own words what *in persona Christi* means.



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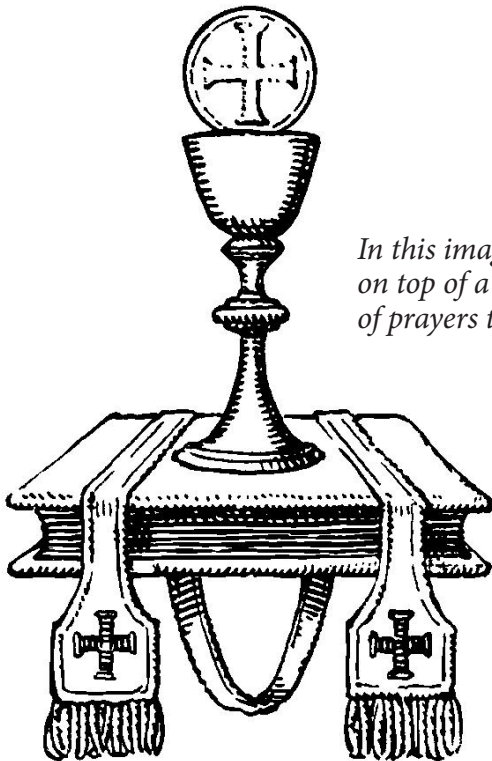
EXPLORATION

PRIESTLY SYMBOLS

1. Draw a physical object associated with Christ and the priesthood. For example, draw a chalice, monstrance, or priestly vestments. You can try to make a careful copy of what you see or draw your own image from your imagination.

2. Write a paragraph explaining any symbolism in the object.

These examples were taken from old Catholic prayer books, before color printing was common:



In this image, a chalice and stole are on top of a sacramentary, the book of prayers the priest uses at Mass.



This is a monstrance used to display the Blessed Sacrament. The word “monstrance” comes from the Latin word “monstrare,” which means “to show.”



This chalice and host are surrounded with a halo to show that Jesus is truly present in the Sacrament. The “IHS” on the host is an ancient symbol for the Holy Name of Jesus. The IHS is a rough equivalent of the first three letters of Jesus’ name in Greek.



REFLECTIVE PRAYER

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL FOR VOCATIONS

The response is "We pray to the Lord."

For all young people of our parishes who are making lifetime choices at this time, we pray to the LORD.

For all families, that they may have a positive regard for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, we pray to the LORD.

For an increase of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, especially within our diocese, we pray to the LORD.

For all seminarians, especially those of our diocese, as they prepare for a lifetime of service in the Church, we pray to the LORD.

For all priests, especially those of our diocese, that they may provide an example and guidance to youth, we pray to the LORD.

For all altar servers, that they may find joy in service at the altar of God, we pray to the LORD.

For religious brothers and sisters in our diocese, that their example may be an encouragement for young people to consider a religious vocation, we pray to the LORD.

For all who work to promote priestly and religious vocations through their prayers, sufferings, and good works, we pray to the LORD.

For all children of the world, that they may all know the love of Jesus in their lifetime, we pray to the LORD.

For all parents who by prayer and example nourish the call of God in each of their children, we pray to the LORD.

For those who will be ordained this year to the priesthood, that God's grace and blessings be generously poured out upon them, we pray to the LORD.

Adapted from petitions from the Archdiocese of New York



A high school student serves as lector at a school Mass.

Photo taken at Cathedral Preparatory School and Seminary

VOCAL PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts
of your faithful and kindle in
them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they
shall be created. And You shall
renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the
Holy Spirit, did instruct the
hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same
Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy His consolations,
Through Christ Our Lord,
AMEN.