

## 9th Grade: Priesthood

### OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on lesson's scripture.

*In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they hovered. One cried out to the other: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!"*

*At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"*

*Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it. "See," he said, "now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged."*

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"*

*"Here I am," I said; "send me!"*

- ISAIAH 6:1-8 <sup>[1]</sup>

### REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

**Note to teacher:** A free program is available to begin a "discernment group" to help male students further discern the priesthood. The Melchizedek

Project offers free books, discussion guides, and leader guides. Groups meet seven times per semester for about 90 minutes. Order a sample packet (available at <http://www.melchizedekproject.com/materials/request-sample-packet>) or request free materials (available at <http://www.melchizedekproject.com/materials/request-materials/>) for your group.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible>.



## PRIESTHOOD



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### VIDEO

#### FISHERS OF MEN



[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible>.



## VIDEO

30 min

### OVERVIEW:

Lead a discussion based on the USCCB's *Fishers of Men* video.

- The video, titled *Fishers of Men Part 1*, is available at the following link, under the Vocation Directors tab. It is just under 20 minutes.  
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/videos.cfm>
- USCCB gives an overview of the video and offers many resources, including discussion questions at the following links.  
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/fishers-of-men-dvd-overview.cfm>  
AND  
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/fishers-of-men.cfm>

### GOALS:

Students will

- communicate a reverence for the priesthood,
- pray for people called to the priesthood,
- be encouraged to pray for God's will in their own lives and the lives of others regarding this vocation.

### PREPARATION:

Review the video, note interesting parts. Choose 2-3 part to discuss with students.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Watch the video in class. Once finished, have the students comment on the video and share what most caught their attention. If discussion is slow, talk about what you thought was interesting, and use the discussion starters below.

### SOME DISCUSSIONS STARTERS:

1. Were there any words or concepts used with which you weren't familiar? Let's go through those.

## PRIESTHOOD

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2. What would be hard about this life? What would be beautiful? If you were there, what would you look forward to? What would you worry about if you were in their shoes?
3. Have you ever gone through any experiences like these people or know priests who have gone through similar experiences (standing up for your beliefs, bringing joy to others, finding happiness in the beauty of the church or good friendships, finding peace in prayer, doing difficult work, meeting new people, sharing what you have, helping people at the hour of death, etc.)? What did this feel like? How did you deal with it? Help students connect their experience with the video, especially with what the individuals in the videos are seeking and finding in their chosen vocations.
4. Have students share stories of any priests whom they admire and why. All students should see the importance of the priesthood, with young men open to considering it, and with young ladies ready to pray for and support their male friends in order to build a culture supportive of the priesthood.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Cover the following points via lecture, or print out handouts and discuss with students.

## 1. The Meaning of the Priesthood / The Goal of the Vocation

A. “Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church” (CCC 1536). Christ first chose twelve men to carry on his saving work until the end of time. Peter was chosen to lead this group (Mt 16). From the very first days as Christians, these apostles chose other men to work with them and carry on when they were gone. Peter’s replacement continued to lead the Church as Pope, while the apostles ordained successors (bishops) and other priests and deacons to work with them. From one apostle to the next, the sacrament of Holy Orders has been passed down, linking our living Church to the very first followers of Christ (CCC 859-861).

## B. The Purpose of the Priesthood

- i. It serves “to build up the People of God” (CCC 1534). The priesthood “is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church” (CCC 1547).
- ii. The priesthood represents Christ and His Church. Priests are regular men; they have weaknesses or faults and they can make mistakes, but when they carry out their priestly ministry, they represent Christ to the Church: “it is Christ himself who was present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. . . . through the ordained ministry, especially that of Bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of a community of believers” (CCC 1548-1550). And since Christ is Head of the Church, and the Church exists mysteriously as the body of Christ, priests also represent the Church to God (CCC 1553).
- iii. The mission of the priesthood is to be “priest, prophet, and king” (CCC 1581). Bishops with their brother priests carry out this three-fold mission:
  - a. *Priest*—this refers to the sanctifying work first foreshadowed in the Old Testament priesthood; priests carry on Christ’s saving redemption in the Holy Mass, by offering the forgiveness of sins through confession, and by of-

fering Anointing of the Sick. The bishop, who has the fullness of the priesthood, also administers the sacrament of Confirmation to seal the baptized with the Holy Spirit, and he ordains other men to the join him in his priestly work. Finally, although anyone can baptize or marry, priests oversee the proper reception of baptism and marriage (see also CCC 893.)

- b. *Prophet*—this refers to the special mission of the bishops and his brother priests to teach the Faith. They receive all the Church’s teaching via Scripture, Tradition, and the living interpreters of that Scripture and Tradition (the Pope and all the bishops in union with him). They teach and preach the good news they have received, in season and out of season, whether popular or unpopular (see also CCC 888).
  - c. *King*—this refers to the role of the bishop and his brother priests as shepherd or leaders for the people of God. In this role, they defend the poor and the weak, they seek good candidates to assist in their work, they advocate for justice in the wider culture, and they work to promote holiness and the spread of the Gospel (see also CCC 894-896).
- C. Following Christ’s very specific example, the Church has always taught her following about Holy Orders:
- i. God gives the vocation of the priesthood as a free and unmerited gift to some men: <sup>[2]</sup> “No one has a right to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. Indeed no one claims this office for himself; he is called to it by God” (CCC 1578).
  - ii. The Church must decide a true calling: “Anyone who thinks he recognizes the signs of God’s call to the ordained ministry must humbly submit his desire to the authority of the Church, who has the responsibility and right to call someone to receive orders” (CCC 1578).
  - iii. God calls only men to the priesthood (CCC 1577). Although Jesus had many women disciples like Mary Magdalene, he chose only men when he named his Apostles, the first priests. The Church follows Jesus in this tradition because the priest, in his ministry to people and especially in the sacraments, is acting in the person of Christ the Man.

[2] If needed, see Senior Unit, which explores in more detail about the requirements of the sacrament and the practical life of the priest. It deals especially with women’s ordination and preparing to talk about this with students.

See also St. John Paul II’s 1994 letter on this topic: *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Congregation for the Clergy, “The Priest: Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community,” 4 August 2002, paragraph 27 [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc\\_con\\_cclergy\\_doc\\_20020804\\_istruzione-presbitero\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_20020804_istruzione-presbitero_en.html)

2. The Fruits of the Priesthood.

- A. *A special configuration* of the soul to Christ. In a unique way, an ordained man will be able to represent Christ and to be Christ’s tool for bringing grace to other believers. Christ works through him. When you confess your sins to a priest, it is to Christ you speak, and through the priest, Christ speaks to you and forgives your sins.
- B. *A permanent change*. Once a man is ordained, this grace marks his soul for all eternity. He never needs to worry about losing it through weak faith or sins or mistakes. The gift to be like Christ and work with Christ for the salvation of the world is forever. (This doesn’t mean a priest shouldn’t work to be virtuous; rather, he should strive to be an example of virtue and holiness!)
- C. *The Grace of the Holy Spirit*. For the bishop this is especially a grace of strength, like the grace the apostles received at Pentecost to go out and teach all nations (CCC 1586). They receive a special grace to love their flock unselfishly, to care for them prudently, to model virtue, and to do whatever it takes to serve them, even to giving up life itself. The sacrament gives an immense capacity to love. Priests share in this grace.
- D. *Fraternal union*. As one of many priests and bishops, the brotherhood of priests and bishops in union with the Pope serves as an example of the Trinity for all the faithful. They bear witness to the “communion of the divine persons” (CCC 877).

E. *Benefits to the members of the Church*. For the laity who have the privilege of interacting with priests, we receive—leadership, guidance, defense, advice, counsel, explanations, and projects of every kind to help the poor, the ignorant, the sick, the dying, the imprisoned, the lonely, the grieving. Besides this, priests arrange for funerals, weddings, baptisms, and all the beautiful feasts which punctuate the year. They are with us to bless and sanctify every important moment of our lives. Bishops seal us with the Holy Spirit. They and the priests hear our confessions and absolve us from our sins. They offer Mass for the whole world and bring us the Eucharist. When we lie dying, they give the Church’s pardon and prepare us for eternal life. When you come to think of it, it is an amazing sacrament. Even priests need other priests—they cannot ordain themselves, nor can they forgive their own sins. They must go to God—but God has arranged it that they must go to God through his humble co-workers—these “other Christs,” their brother priests. St. John Vianney wrote about the strange miracle of the priesthood “*You might have two hundred angels there, but they could not absolve you. A priest, however simple he may be, can do it; he can say to you, ‘Go in peace; I pardon you.’ Oh, how great is a priest! The priest will not understand the greatness of his office till he is in Heaven. If he understood it on earth, he would die, not of fear, but of love. . . . The priest is not a priest for himself; he does not give himself absolution; he does not administer the Sacraments to himself. He is not for himself, he is for you. After God, the priest is everything. Leave a parish twenty years without priests; they will worship beasts. If the missionary Father and I were to go away, you would say, ‘What can we do in this church? There is no Mass; Our Lord is no longer there: we may as well pray at home.’ When people wish to destroy religion, they begin by attacking the priest, because where there is no longer any priest there is no sacrifice, and where there is no longer any sacrifice there is no religion.*”<sup>[3]</sup>

[3] *Catechism on the Priesthood* by St. John Vianney (1786-1859)

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Reinforce the concepts given below. Optional stories and resources are provided to illustrate the points, generate discussion, or use as meditations / homework readings. Teachers are free to summarize some stories in their own words for brevity.

1. All of us are called to support the priesthood.
  - A. A beautiful example of a woman who supported the priesthood comes from the story of St. Margaret Clitherow. (See story <sup>[4]</sup>)
2. A life that serves priesthood is a life that practices prayer and virtue. All the virtues are needed to support the priesthood. One especially important virtue is Poverty.
  - A. It may seem strange to associate poverty with the priesthood. Diocesan priests do not make a specific promise of poverty. Nevertheless, they understand that poverty is an evangelical counsel and that “Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple” (CCC 915).
  - B. A priest who practices poverty according to the circumstances God gives him, bears witness to Christ’s own life. Christ sometimes feasted with His disciples, and sometimes He did without. Sometimes He did without everything, and He was completely emptied on the cross for the sake of the world. This self-emptying is something we are all called to as Christians, and priests can help us to be prepared to do this by their example.



## PRIESTHOOD

## CLOSING

ST. MARGARET CLITHEROW (1556-1586) <sup>[5]</sup>

When Margaret Clitherow was a little girl, anti-Catholic legislation had already been going on in England for some time. King Henry VIII’s decision to create a new Church of England separate from the Roman Catholic Church, in order to take a second wife, had led to a new era. His daughter by a second wife was now reigning, and the country’s new official church was to be promoted at the expense of the Catholic religion.

In 1559 a fine for refusing to attend Church of England services was begun. Anyone attending Catholic mass would be fined 100 marks. Any priest saying Mass and any person arranging for a Mass to be offered could be executed.

This was the world Margaret Middleton grew up in. She was not born a Catholic. She was daughter of the Sheriff of York and married a butcher named John Clitherow when she was 15. She would have two sons and a daughter. She was an excellent housekeeper with good business sense and able to help her husband in his work. She was a good neighbor and well-liked in the town. Although her husband was not Catholic, he was sympathetic to Catholics because his brother was a priest. Sometime around her 18th or 19th year Margaret quietly converted to the Catholic faith. She began to hide priests in her home and arrange for Mass to be offered in secret. She would continue to teach her children Catholic Doctrine and keep the faith alive for her fellow townsmen for the next ten years.



Margaret Clitherow

Meanwhile, the situation for Catholics became more dangerous. The fine for refusing to attend Church of England services increased to 20 pounds, almost half of a wealthy man’s annual income. Jesuit priests who had been traveling about to administer the sacraments were absolutely forbidden to enter the country. Some of the very priests Margaret hid in her home were later captured and executed.

Margaret herself was arrested in 1586, having been accused of hiding and aiding priests. In order to keep her children and servants safe from having to testify, she refused a trial.

Although she was probably pregnant, she was condemned to death by “pressing.” She was tied down on the ground; a sharp stone was placed on her back and then a board which covered her entire body. This board was weighted with stones until she was crushed to death. In a death that took almost thirty minutes, she was heard to cry out for Christ’s mercy.

Her children were left orphans—but they never held this against her. They were inspired by their mother. She had helped her entire town to have access to priests, confessions, and the Mass—at constant risk to her own life. In time, her daughter became a nun. Her two sons became priests, ready to carry on the work Margaret had died for.

[5] See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04059b.htm> for more information.

- C. Priests do not make a promise of poverty because it sometimes is a greater service to the Church and to the poor for priests to administrate great churches, libraries, schools, etc. and have access to the tools—even expensive tools—to be able to offer them to others.
- D. The main thing is that a priest, like any Christian, should be detached from material wealth. A priest who can do without can be a great source of strength for his people.
  - i. One good story to tell here is the story of “the Gaucho priest.” (See story)

[4] This story is good read after the story of Thomas More and John Fisher in the Marriage Unit. It can also stand alone.

## HOMEWORK

Choose and assign one of the following options:

1. Read about or research another priest-saint not covered during the class. (Some examples are St. Martin de Porres, St. Padre Pio, St. Dominic, St. John Bosco). Write a reflection, answering these questions about the saint/story:
  - A. Have you ever gone through any experiences like these people or know anyone who has (serving the family, being sick, being afraid or in danger, standing up for your beliefs, doing work that didn't seem to fit you, caring for others, having tension with someone you love, etc.)? What did it feel like? How did you deal with it?
  - B. What would be hard about this life? What would be beautiful? If you were there, what would you look forward to? What would you worry about if you were in their shoes?
2. Based on the information from this lesson, have students answer these questions:
  - A. What is the purpose of the priesthood? Who first began it and why?
  - B. What are the three roles of the priest imitating Christ and carrying out his three-fold mission? What does a priest do, in living out the role and mission of each one of the three?
  - C. List and describe some of the fruits of the priesthood—for priests and for the whole world.



## PRIESTHOOD

CLOSING *continued*

### THE GAUCHO PRIEST (1840-1914)

The Catholic News Agency printed this article by Kerri Lenartowick about a parish priest beatified by Pope Francis in September 2013.

Vatican City, Sep 14, 2013 / 02:57 pm (CNA/EWTN News).

On the occasion the beatification of Fr. José Gabriel Brochero of Cordoba, Argentina, known to locals as the "cowboy priest," Pope Francis praised him for his open heart.

"Brochero was a normal man, fragile, like any of us," said Pope Francis. But his greatness came from the fact that, "he knew the love of Jesus. He let his heart be touched by the mercy of God."

Born in 1840 and ordained to the priesthood at age 26, Fr. Brochero was known for traversing his mountainous parish by mule to bring the gospel and sacraments to the people of Cordoba.

Pope Francis confirmed this image of the priest in his letter to Archbishop José María Arancedo, President of the Argentinian Bishop's Conference, on the occasion of Fr. Brochero's beatification.

The Pope said that for the people of his parish, receiving a visit from Fr. Brochero was like "a visit from Jesus to each family."

When visiting his parishioners, the Pope described how the priest would bring the image of the Virgin Mary and his Mass kit and prayer book.

While explaining the faith he would "speak in a way that everyone could understand because what he said about the faith and love that he had toward Jesus would come directly from his heart."



Padre Brochero as a young priest



Padre Brochero on his mule.

His apostolic courage is an important witness for missionaries today, noted the Holy Father.

"Brochero did not stay in the parish offices: he would exhaust himself riding his mule and he ended up being sick with leprosy."

He was faithful to the end, continuing to "pray and celebrate Mass even as a blind leper."

He was well known for his aid to the sick and dying, particularly in the cholera epidemic of 1867 that devastated the city of Cordoba.

In late 1869, he was assigned to the parish of St. Albert, which extended over a region of 4,336 square kilometers.

The impoverished population of 10,000 who made up the parish had no roads or schools. Unable to be reached by the wider world, they were, according to Fr. Brochero, "abandoned by everyone but not by God."

Early in his time at St. Albert, Fr. Brochero led a group of people over the dangerous Sierra Mountains to the city of Cordoba for a retreat of Spiritual Exercises with the Jesuits.

Although the journey was perilous due to intense snowstorms, it bore great spiritual fruit in the life of the people.

In addition to his people's spiritual growth, the priest sought his flock's social progress and worked to build local schools, construct paths for transportation, and even convinced the local authorities to provide postal and telegraph couriers.

An 1887 article in a local Cordoba newspaper described him as an exceptional priest whose work was not limited to preaching.

"He practices the gospel. Are you missing a carpenter? He's a carpenter. Are you missing a laborer? He's a laborer. He rolls up his cassock wherever he is, takes the shovel or hoe and opens a public road in 15 days aided by his parishioners," the article said.

Fr. Brochero died in 1914.



Padre Brochero near the end of his life.

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