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BEARERS OF CHRIST

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HE DAY" has finally arrived for another class of young Dominicans. On the morning of June 3rd, they knelt before Bishop McNamara and became priests of God. Twenty centuries of uninterrupted priestly powers flowed through episcopal hands to grace the souls of these new laborers in the vineyard of Christ. They received, as from the Master Himself, the "tools of their trade"—the powers to offer sacrifice in His name, to forgive sins through His mercy, and to teach, with His authority, the truths of salvation. For ten or more years, these young Levites had been preparing their souls for the task ahead. They had prayed and studied. They had worked and meditated in order that, in the fullness of their time, they might go forth and do the work of God, that they might do their share in gathering the harvest of souls from the fields of the world. To the soul who knows not God, they hope to bring the knowledge and blessings of the true faith. To the faithful, they will bring solace, counsel, sacramental graces, and, more especially, Christ Himself through the lifetime of Masses they will be privileged to say. Their newly received powers will enable them to do the work of Christ as instruments of Christ. They can look for success; they can be confident of victory for they have become sharers in the Priesthood of Christ Himself.

"COME, FOLLOW ME"

One day, while Jesus was walking by the sea of Galilee, He saw two fishermen casting their nets into the waters. He came up and said: "Come ye after Me and I will make you to be fishers of men."¹ Simon and Andrew dropped their nets and followed Him. A little farther up

¹ Matt. 4, 19.

the beach they met two others. Again the Master called and two more were added to the little band who were the first to hear and heed the call to the Priesthood of Christ. To these were given the powers to offer sacrifice, to forgive, and to preach the word. To them the Master, the night before He died, entrusted the power to offer God to God, to bind and to loose, to move hearts by the divine influence of their word and work. Since that first ordination, countless souls have heard those beautiful words of the Savior's invitation: "Come, follow Me," and have left all to labor with Christ in the work of God.

It has been almost two thousand years since Christ formed and fashioned His priesthood. Under His guidance and care it continues today in the fullness of vigor and the strength of power with which He first endowed it. The most humble pastor in the most remote of this world's parishes has the same priestly powers, shares in the same priesthood to which Peter, Andrew, James, and John were first called.

SUBLIME COMMISSION

Every priest of every age is the personal representative of Christ among His people. The Master lives in the priest, uses his body, soul, dispositions, and talents to teach and sanctify all nations. In the Catholic priest, there is something more than a mere man. In him Jesus Christ speaks, works, and accomplishes. Whoever rejects him, rejects the Lord Himself. Whoever listens to his words, listens to Christ. The priest is a mediator between God and His creatures, bringing God to men and men to God. "Taken from amongst men," yet "ordained for men in the things that appertain to God"—that is the priest! That is the office to which these young men have been called and for which they have been newly anointed. As mediators their life will be a life of sacrifice and intercession—a life which carries a double privilege and duty, one to God and the other to men.

Their greatest work, and their most precious privilege, finds its perfection in the Sacrifice of the Mass. To them has been given the sublime power of changing lowly bread and wine into the divine Body and Blood of Christ Himself. Receiving the chalice from the hands of the Bishop, they heard the words the very angels have not heard: "Receive the power of offering the sacrifice for the living and the dead in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The priest has another power joined to the principal power of offering homage to God in the behalf of men. He must also bring to men the blessings and graces which flow so abundantly from the loving Heart of God. The priest must administer the sacraments and

teach the faithful the truths which will set souls free. The Master has said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."² Pius XI gives voice to the Church's estimation of this great power which enables one man to forgive another his offenses against God. "This is that power which, as St. John Chrysostom says: 'God gave neither to Angels nor Archangels'—the power to remit sin . . . a tremendous power, so peculiar to God that even human pride could not make the mind to conceive that it could be given to men. 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' And, when we see it exercised by mere man there is reason to ask ourselves, not, indeed, with pharisaical scandal, but with reverent surprise at such a dignity: 'Who is this that forgiveth sins also?' But it is so: the God-man Who possessed the 'power to forgive sins' willed to hand it on to His priests, to relieve, in His divine generosity and mercy, the need of moral purification which is rooted in the human heart . . . 'I absolve thee from thy sins!' These words fall, it is true, from the lips of one who, in his turn, must needs beg the same absolution from another priest. This does not debase the merciful gift; but makes it, rather, appear greater; since beyond the weak creature is seen more clearly the hand of God through whose power is wrought this wonder."³

PRIEST AS PREACHER

The priest as mediator must not only administer the sacraments to strengthen souls wearied by the seemingly endless struggle to win heaven's rewards but must also dispense the mysteries of God through his words. The preaching of the Gospel with the authority of God Himself was imposed on the disciples—and in them, on all priests of the centuries to follow—just before the Master ascended into heaven. He commissioned them to instruct the flock, saying: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."⁴ Only the Catholic priest can say: "The doctrine which I teach is not my doctrine but the doctrine of Him Who has sent me."

GREATER THAN KINGS

St. John Chrysostom, meditating upon the dignity and power of the priesthood, wrote in one of his sermons: "The power of the priest

² John 20, 22-23.

³ Encycl. *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* Pius XI. Dec. 20, 1935.

⁴ Matt. 28, 19-20.

is more venerable and greater than that of kings. Speak not of royal purple, of diadems, of golden vestures—these are but shadows, frailer than the flowers of spring, compared to the powers and privileges of the priesthood.”⁵ The priest is another Christ—a representative, it is true, but a representative of the King of Kings, Christ, Our Lord. “This is *My Body*: This is *My Blood*,” says the priest at the altar; “I absolve you from your sins” fills the weary soul of the penitent with the peace of forgiveness. Behold the power of Christ in His priests! What a special bond of friendship exists between Christ and His priests! What higher dignity was ever bestowed on mere man?

“But,” asks the humble heart, “where is to be found one who is worthy of such a calling?” We may answer that there is no one worthy to be a priest of God. Christ knew that. He was fully conscious of the divine sublimity of the office and He knew well enough the imperfection and sin which clouded the souls of men. Yet His Mercy instituted the priesthood and willed that men should share in its royal majesty. “Neither doth any man take this honor to himself; but he that is called by God as Aaron was.”⁶ The Master calls whomsoever He pleases—a mystery of Divine Love which called a St. Paul and a St. Augustine as well as a St. John and a St. Dominic. He Who calls will see to it that the humble heart, even though returning from the depths of sin, will have the graces necessary for a virtuous and priestly life.

BEARERS OF CHRIST

In this sin-ridden and fearful world, was there ever a greater need of those messengers of divine grace—the priests? “And seeing the multitudes, He had compassion on them: because they were distressed and lying like sheep that have no shepherd: then He saith to His disciples: the harvest indeed is great but the laborers are few. Pray ye then the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into His harvest.”⁷ The Lord has had compassion on the multitudes. This year all over the world more young men have been sent to serve in the vineyard and to watch over His wandering sheep. Thousands have bowed under the outstretched hands of their Bishops to receive their new office and to open their souls to the graces which will enable them to be “true bearers of Christ in a disorderly society.”⁸ We pray that the High Priest will give them strength to bear well their new standards unto victory of heaven, sanctified in truth and anointed unto the eternal priesthood.

⁵ St. John Chrysostom. Hom. V. on Isaias VII.

⁶ Heb. 5, 4.

⁷ Matt. 9, 36-38.

⁸ Encycl. *Ad Catholicos Sacerdotum*. Pius XI. Dec. 20, 1935.