



The Role of the Laity in Liturgy

Never before in the history of the Church has the absolutely essential role of the layperson been so dramatically emphasized as it is now. Particularly since Vatican II, the Church has called for a renewal in the life and role of the laity. Yet among the faithful, there remains a fundamental lack of understanding of the lay vocation and its role in the Church's mission.

For many, there is a notion that the only real vocation in the Church is the ordained or vowed priesthood and religious. They believe "the Church" is the ordained office and only people in habits or collars are called to serve. Many think that the role of the laity is to help out around the parish and that they are not called to play an integral part in the mission of the Church.

But in fact, the actual teaching of the Church is that laypeople have a distinct and very real role in the spreading of the Gospel. The Church needs laypeople to take up the challenge of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 – "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." The Church teaches that, in dignity, laypeople are absolutely equal to those in ordained and religious life. In mission, the work of the laity is the crucial means by which the world is to encounter Christ.

All Are Called

The central Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, written during the Second Vatican Council was *Lumen Gentium*, which translates as "Light of the Nations." The heart of this document is its teaching in chapter five that reminds us that the call to holiness is not limited to one state in life, but is indeed universal, embracing all the baptized. "Fortified by so many and such powerful

means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his (or her) own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). The call to holiness is not just for some, it is for all. This is the fundamental vocation of all believers.

Still, many of the common understandings of laity exist because they are often defined by what the laity are not. This is misguided. The laity are not priests. They are not men and women religious. Therefore, many assume they don't have a vocation, that they don't have a mission.

The Church, however, defines laity by what they *are*: sharers in Christ's office of priest, prophet, and king, holders of an important vocation, and critical participants in fulfilling the mission of the Church.

It is critical to realize that, according to the Church itself, the vocation and mission of laypeople is derived from the universal call to holiness and the reception of Baptism. It is further strengthened through Confirmation. The place and work in the body of Christ is given to laypeople directly, by the Holy Spirit, not indirectly through the ordained office.

Every person has been called by God to his or her own specific vocation and mission. Laypeople are called to share in the mission of Christ's Church by living in the midst of the world and addressing all its problems and concerns with the divine message of salvation.

Bishops and priests, as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, have the important task to teach, sanctify, and govern, precisely so that the vast majority of the Mystical Body of Christ, that is the laity, can do the work of evangelizing, sanctifying, and renewing the rest of the world beyond the sanctuary. "Though they differ essentially and not only in degree . . . (they) are none the less ordered to one another; (since) each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ." (*Lumen gentium*, 10)

Roles In Liturgy

The priest has a unique role at the altar, just as we laypeople have a unique role in the world. In the Eucharistic Feast, the priest, when

