

ON THE SUBJECT OF WOMEN PRIESTS

I am for the participation of women in the Church, I am for the participation of men in the Church, and I am for the participation of children in the Church - both boys and girls. What I am for most of all is the *distribution of gifts in the Church by the Holy Spirit who formed the Church after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven*. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts from the Father, and the Son. They originate in God the Father, and are distributed through Jesus, his Son, and our Lord for the good of the whole Church, by the working of the Holy Spirit. *The Spirit is the Lord and giver of Life of the Church!*

Having said this, it would seem to me that, of ourselves, we have no real say in how things are fundamentally setup. The structure of the Church, the reality and functioning of the Sacraments, the insistence on corroboration with Apostolic Tradition, the protection of an infallible teaching authority (the Magisterium) all speak to the fact that the Church is not now, nor ever was, nor ever will be a democracy. *The Church is better than a democracy*. A democratic form of governing human beings ideally guarantees only the barest and most basic of human rights that will end in the death of the person or the democratic society. As Christians - as Catholic Christians, we know that of ourselves, human beings - born into this world with the persistent reality of original sin (evidenced at every turn) - actually have no rights at all. The reality of the matter is that *in the sight of God we are nothing, and we have nothing!* No one should have any claim to anything - at all. *All is gift! All is grace! All is love!* Being given free-will, we as human beings, do, however, have the choice of either using our free-will for what it was intended - to love God with all our being, and to love others as we love him and ourselves; or not - to love ourselves more than God, and to use other people for our own advantage and pleasure and perhaps give God a nod now and then - if at all.

The most astounding gift that God has ever given us - completely from his unbounded graciousness and tender mercy - is the gift of redemption from the slavery to sin and death! *He gave his only begotten Son for the life of the world!* God the Word, who became flesh - who became a man - who became the most perfect of all of God's creations - *of his own free-will cooperated in the plan of*

salvation - and gave his life on the Cross so that we could be free. Jesus, the God-Man, the Bridegroom of the Church - *gave his life up for her!* And it is up to her (us) now to prepare herself (ourselves) for the Nuptial Feast of Heaven that will take place at the end of time - when Jesus will take his bride into the bridal chamber - and live blissfully and in the fullness of beatitude for ever!

The Church, then, set up as it was *very specifically by Jesus - with its Scriptural, Apostolic and Magisterial dimensions - cannot be tampered with*. Because if any of it is tampered with, then all of it is tampered with - and it stops being the Church of Jesus - his very Body extended in space and time! This does not mean by any means that the Spirit cannot lead us into ever newer, deeper and more refreshing understanding and interpretations and ways of looking at *what was given at the beginning of the Church*; that is, in fact, one of the main roles of the Holy Spirit in his function as Teacher. But the Spirit cannot and would not lead us into the temptation of wanting to split off from the main root of the vine, in any way, or to pick and choose what parts of the doctrine of structure are acceptable and not.

And so the Spirit gifts the Church with the personnel it needs in the position that it wants, and places them where they are needed. Gender preferences for certain roles of ministry are up to him - but they cannot divert from the original setup - the setup that developed in Apostolic times and were later defined as unchangeable because they were in harmony with the intent of Jesus, and the teaching of the Apostles. For this reason women can never be priests - *because there is only One Priest and that is Jesus - and he was a man*. This is not an unfair conclusion. The priest, by ordination is configured to Christ as Head of the Church; and if he is the Bridegroom as well - then the priest - in order to image Christ visibly to the faithful of the Church until the end of time - needs to be a man, as well. *It very much has to do with the propriety of imagery and symbolism* - the Church is all about imagery and symbolism, as well as substance and reality and sacrament.

Jesus could not have chosen women, even though he was starting something that seemed radically new - a new Church rising out of an old religion. This was because everything about the “new religion” was but a fulfillment of what was in the “old religion.” And the Old

religion was the way it was because God, the Father of Jesus set it up that way! And Jesus would not ever think of doing anything against his Father's will. And so, Jesus *being a priest in the order of Melchisedech*, and following the setup of the priesthood of the Old Testament - *became High Priest for ever* - and thus his successors, the bishops and their helpers the priests could only be male as well - because he was male. And then, the whole argument about future imagery would still be something that Jesus would endorse because it could not be any other way!

Here is an interesting aside. Let's say that God the Father had a Daughter instead of a Son - "Jesusa." Then there would be every reason to switch the imagery around the other way. It would be part and parcel of the imagery for Jesusa and future priestesses to be female. But God's only-begotten could not have been anything other than male because, speaking of imagery, symbolism and reality, he was the New Adam. And Adam was male! Adam sinned! Only the New Adam - in his role as High Priest could offer his own self as Victim, on the altar of the Cross which was he, shedding his own blood as the Paschal Lamb. *We adore you, O Christ and we bless and thank you - for this amazing act of love for us and for our salvation!*

And so, it has nothing whatsoever at all to do with women's rights that they cannot be priests. It has everything to do with the Nuptial Feast of Heaven to which *each Bishop and Priest symbolizes Christ, the Bridegroom who awaits the embrace and the love of his faithful Bride, the Church!*

I do, in fact, agree wholeheartedly that roles of women in the daily operation of the Church are not only good but necessary. And I am very happy to witness the increase of participation by women, especially in seeing to the smooth operation of our parishes and our dioceses throughout our country and the world. The Spirit does give gifts to whomever he wishes - gifts of administration, gifts of enriching the liturgy - gifts of teaching and preaching - gifts of insight and healing to men, women and children -for the optimal functioning of the Body of Christ. *But the safe-haven of orthodoxy and the role of chief shepherd need reside primarily in the office of the priest.* The priest - by his ordination - shares in a *special outpouring of the Spirit*

to know how to shepherd the people of God *according to the Truth which is Jesus Christ*. Each bishop possesses the *charism of truth*. This is gifted to him by the Spirit at his ordination as bishop. The priest then, as extension of the bishop - a sharer in his power and ministry also possesses to a greater degree than a layman might the charism of guiding truth! In other words, "Father Joe" is not just another man among the men and women of the parish - he truly does possess the *grace of truth* to lead in a very special and specific way! He needs to be regarded in a most respectful way, and loved as Christ himself.

One last point is this. There is something that the women who seek priesthood (even if it were possible) do not understand. On ordination day - not only is a priest given special gifts of the Spirit for ministry - but he is also given a *newer and heavier weighting of the personal cross that he is carrying as an ordinary Christian*. It can manifest itself anytime during or after the ordination ceremony! This is very much evident in my own life as a priest - and comfortingly for me, it is founded in scripture. St. Paul - because of his giftedness as Apostle (especially his extraordinary visions) was given the "thorn in the flesh" and an "angel of Satan to beat him." These were lovingly dispatched gifts from God to help him keep his head on straight and to keep his feet on the ground. The "third cross" as I like to call it (Baptism is the first fitting, Confirmation, the second) may be something that women mercifully don't have to worry about carrying. I invite you think about that "third cross" whenever you see a priest - pray for him - for every one of them has one - (whether they even know it or not!)

I would like to close this reflection by thanking God the Father and the Son for giving us the Holy Spirit to enliven and guide the Church, which I know I love so much! I thank him for choosing me to be a priest. I thank him for the "third cross" that he has given me to carry! I pray that I may lead all of the faithful that he puts in my care to the Nuptial Banquet to which we are all called - and that Jesus, the One Priest and Bridegroom will possess us all and love us forever - as we continue to grow in our love for him and for all of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

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