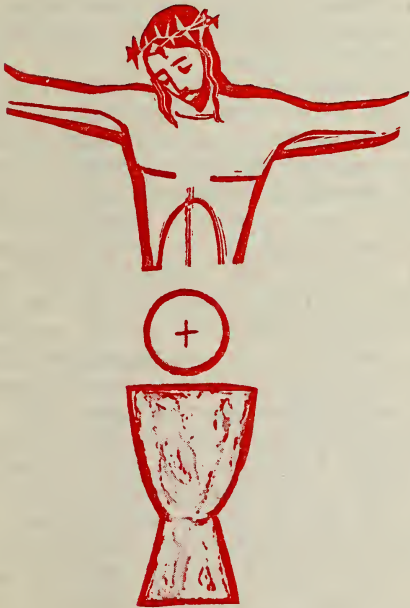


# Apostles of Prayer and the Priesthood Of the Faithful



Joseph F. Hogan, S.J.

## TAKE 5 MINUTES TO READ CAREFULLY—THEN BECOME AN APOSTLE OF PRAYER

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### THE LAITY "A HOLY PRIESTHOOD"

You are not accustomed to hear yourself called a "Priest of the Lord". Yet, it is an inspiring fact that you are. This does not mean that you receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders, but it does mean, definitely and dogmatically, that you share in the priesthood of Christ.

This doctrine of the Priesthood of the Faithful is not a liturgical innovation or something new just out of Vatican II. Long before the Vatican Council, Pius XII wrote in his Encyclical "Mediator Dei": "Let the Faithful learn to what a high degree they have been raised. By virtue of Baptism, as by a common title, Christians are made *members of Christ the Priest*. By the character which is imprinted on their souls they are appointed to the worship of God. Thus they participate, according to their condition, in the Priesthood of Christ." (88) And centuries before, St. Peter wrote in his first Encyclical Letter to the first Christians: "You are a royal priesthood." (1 Peter 2: 9-10) He said it again for emphasis and develops the idea further: "Be yourself... a *holy priesthood* to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2: 5-6)

Today, Vatican II, on almost every page describing the role of the laity, stresses or develops this inspiring doctrine with its practical application to daily Christian liv-

ing. For example, the *Constitution on the Church* says: "Besides linking them to his life and mission, Christ also gave them a sharing in his priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of souls."

The Council even speaks of your priestly "consecration". Recall that at Baptism and Confirmation you were anointed with Holy Chrism and there was a laying on of hands (somewhat like at ordination). A priestly character was imprinted on your soul and the Holy Spirit was given to you in a special way. You were consecrated and made holy to the Lord. Here's the way Vatican II describes it: "The laity, incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, are *assigned* to the *apostolate* by the Lord Himself, and *are consecrated for the royal priesthood.*"

### YOUR PRIESTLY VOCATION

So the answer to the question "Are all the Faithful priests?", is an emphatic and dogmatic "Yes"! And "are you commissioned to the Apostolate by the Lord Himself?" "Definitely!" So yours is a real priesthood with apostolic responsibilities and privileges. At Baptism and Confirmation the Holy Spirit invested you with a new quality that produces in you the priestly dignity of Jesus Himself, in a limited but real way. Consequently, you have the commission and the capacity to offer sacrifice, "through Christ, with Him and in Him", in a manner pleasing and acceptable to God. With complete confidence, therefore, in your "royal priesthood" you can and

should respond wholeheartedly to the celebrant's request at Mass, "Brethren, pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty."

Obviously, this is not a complete treatise on the dignity of the Priesthood of the Faithful. However, it is sufficient for our purpose to show how the Apostles of Prayer program helps us to fulfill our priestly and apostolic vocation in a realistic and inspiring way. Let's see how!

### TO OFFER SACRIFICE

*The Apostleship of Prayer centers your life on offering and living the Mass.* This must be, since the liturgy is a sacred action surpassing all others, and no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy. "It is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows." Further, it is the Mass that teaches us to love God and man with some of the "breadth, and length and height, and depth" of love as found in the heart of Christ. "The renewal in the Eucharist of the covenant between the Lord and man draws the faithful into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire." (Const. on the Liturgy, n. 10) Naturally then, the Church and the Apostles of Prayer desire that all should participate frequently, actively, and fully in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. And the reason? We should take our share in the priesthood of Christ seriously! "Such participation by the Christian people, 'A chosen race, a holy priesthood' is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism."

An essential element of "full participation" in the Mass is that in union with Christ we offer ourselves to the Father, responding to God's request, "My son, give me your heart." Like Christ we are priest and victim, the offered and the one offering. The Constitution on the Liturgy (n. 48) emphasizes this basic truth, "The Church earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith . . . and offering the Immaculate Victim . . . should learn to offer themselves too." Obviously, a sincere giving of self does not end with "The Mass is ended." That's when it really begins. We actualize this offering in our daily life. We live the Mass! And to help us keep our Mass-commitment in the foreground of consciousness and live it out, the Apostleship of Prayer recommends as basic:

### A DAILY PRIESTLY OFFERING OF SELF

*"I offer You my prayers, works, joys, sufferings of this day in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass."*  
—The Morning Offering

The Constitution on the Church strongly recommends such a daily offering as one of our priestly duties and privileges: "Christ gives them a share in his priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men . . . For all their works, prayers, and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation . . . and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne, all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . And thus the laity consecrates the world itself to God." (n. 34)

In this statement the Council is emphasizing that our priestly worship of God does not end with the Mass. Work and worship are not to be separated. They are the two sides of the same golden coin of our priestly service. It is not a case of "Now, I worship God at Sunday Mass and the rest of the week I settle down to my secular occupations." That is spiritual schizophrenia. The Council and the Apostleship of Prayer put unity, coherence and emphasis into our whole life and all its details with this spiritual directive: (Apostolate of the Laity, n. 4) "They do not separate union with Christ from their life. Rather by performing their work according to God's will they can grow in that union. In this way must the laity make progress in holiness . . . Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious program of life. As the Apostle states: 'Whatever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.' " (Col. 3:17)

### **APOSTLES AT WORK AND WORSHIP**

The Council goes further and stresses that this offering of our "prayers, works, joys and sufferings" has an apostolic dimension. Here again it is not a case of "I'm an apostle when I'm engaged in Catholic action; I'm a secularist when I am working at my job." We are *full-time* apostles! The Church says: "Let each one remember that he can have an impact on *all* men and contribute to the salvation of *the whole world* by public worship and prayer as well as by penance and the *voluntary acceptance of*

*the labors and hardships of life.* By such means does the Church grow in likeness to the suffering Christ." In fact, the Church regards this as the soul of the apostolate and gives it the impressive title of "spiritual ecumenism". "Holiness of life, along with the public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the *soul* of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called "Spiritual Ecumenism". (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 8)

### **PERFECT CHRISTIAN LIVING**

The Popes have described this priestly and apostolic way of life of the Apostleship of Prayer as a "perfect form of Christian living" and "a perfect form of devotion to the Heart of Christ." What do you think? If you agree with the Popes, then, when you make and live your daily priestly offering, recall that it is **LITURGICALLY** oriented—it is centered on the Mass, leads you to the Mass and is really living the Mass. It is **APOSTOLIC**—"for the salvation of souls." It is **ECUMENICAL**—"for the reunion of all Christians." **IT THINKS WITH THE CHURCH**—"for the intentions of our Bishops . . . and our Holy Father." The *Morning Offering is love*—a personal daily commitment to the Sacred Heart. If made seriously and lived out, it is a perfect fulfillment of your priestly function.

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**To Become a Member:**

**Enroll, say your Daily Offering and sincerely try to live it.**

**THE DAILY OFFERING**  
**of an**  
**APOSTLE OF PRAYER**

*O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world. I offer them for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart: the salvation of souls, reparation for sin, the reunion of all Christians. I offer them for the intentions of our Bishops and of all Apostles of Prayer, and in particular for those recommended by our Holy Father this month.*



*All these become Spiritual Sacrifices acceptable to God. Thus, we consecrate the world itself to God.*

with ecclesiastical approbation

**APOSTLES OF PRAYER**

211 E. 87th Street, New York, N. Y. 10028