

St. Thomas of Canterbury (2012)

(Hebrews 5:1-10, St. John 10:11-16)

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

Sacred Scripture teaches us that there is only one Priest in the Catholic and Apostolic Church. Only one. His name is Jesus Christ.

In v.6 of the Epistle we are told the Father declared to our Lord Jesus *“Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisadec.”*

In this declaration, the Father has given our Lord Jesus an exclusive and eternal priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood has been fulfilled in the Melchisadecian priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Because this priesthood is eternal there is only, and can be only, One priest. Jesus Christ.

But, you may ask, what about all the other priests in the orthodox branches of the Church, including our own? Are they not priests also? Yes we are. But we have a “derivative priesthood.”

By the grace of God every man who is ordained into the office of the priesthood is given a share in the eternal priesthood of Christ.

No priest is so on his own. He is a priest only by his being in communion with bishops in the true Apostolic Succession who are in communion with the One, exclusive, Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This morning’s Epistle states: *“...no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest...”*

On the night of His resurrection from the dead Our Lord said to His Apostles *“...as the Father has sent me, even so I send you. And then we are told: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”* In breathing upon His Apostles, Jesus gave them a share of His eternal priesthood.

This share in the eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ has been handed down throughout the ages of the Church by the laying on of hands.

To St. Timothy the Apostle St. Paul wrote: *“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands of the presbytery.”*

When a man is ordained to the sacred priesthood by the laying on of hands, He is given a “charism”, the gift of grace that is a share in the exclusive, eternal priesthood of Jesus.

In the ACC when the Bishop lays his hands upon the man being ordained and says: *“Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands.”*

Following the Biblical standard, our church ordains men to the priesthood in the same manner as it has been done in the Church throughout the ages.

This is very important, for in doing so our church has the assurance that the actions of each priest, whether during mass or any other sacramental act he administers, is valid, true and efficacious; just as if Christ was administering it Himself.

A true priest doesn’t minister in his own person, but in the *persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, as St. Paul explains it in 2 Cor. 2:10.

Sadly, some men, far too many of them in the history of the Church and the ACC, have not put the gift they have been given into practice in the manner Christ, His Apostles and so many great Saints like the patron of our parish, Thomas Becket did.

In the words of St. Paul they have *“handled the word of God deceitfully.”*

This deceitful handling of God’s Word has caused great trouble to the Church and its people, and many schisms within it.

God will no doubt judge those who have perpetrated this sin upon her.

No priest has an excuse for such behavior. Not when we have great examples such as the Saints of Scripture and of the Church such as our Patron, St. Thomas Becket.

As most of you are aware, before he was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket was far from being a saint. But after his ordination to the priesthood and then his consecration, he embraced the gift of the share of Christ’s exclusive priesthood he had been given and defended the honor of Christ’s Church unto death by martyrdom. This is an example every priest is called to follow.

Ordination should humble a man. It should never puff him up with pride.

He must realize that what He has been graced with is derived from the order and office of Jesus Christ, transmitted through holy Episcopal hands.

The priest has authority yes, but only because he is first *under* the authority of Jesus Christ and the Bishop whom God has placed over him as his Reverend Father in God.

The Centurion who came to Jesus seeking healing for his servant in St. Matthew 8 understood this, and Jesus told him “*I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.*”

After his consecration St. Thomas Becket understood this too.

He understood that while he *had* authority as the Archbishop of Canterbury, he had that authority only because he himself was *under* the authority of Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest.

In each generation the Church has had to defend herself from attacks, sometimes from the outside and more often from false doctrines within.

In his day, Becket had to defend the church from the attacks of King Henry II from without, and from some of his fellow bishops from within.

Both wanted to alter the order of the Church by tearing down the authority of the Episcopal Office and supplanting it with the authority of the king.

In our generation the most detrimental alteration to the order and ministry the Church has had to defend against is “women’s ordination” (so-called).

It is both a blatant Biblical error and a Christological heresy.

We need to use nothing other than *Prima Scriptura* to see how obvious an error it is. Passages such as 1 Cor. 11:34-37, 1 Tim. 2:11-15 and 3:1-14, and Titus 1:5-9 are as plain as Scripture can speak on any doctrine.

These passages need little if any extra-Biblical assistance to understand.

Still there are those who make claims like: “Scripture also teaches that the first clergy of the Church were all Jews and therefore non-Jewish men cannot be ordained.” Those who present such arguments forget that one of the first seven deacons was a Gentile proselyte named Nicolas from Antioch.

They forget St. Timothy was born of a Jewish father and a Greek mother, and that both of St. Titus’ parents were Greeks.

Moreover, long before non-Jewish men were ordained to the ministry God tells us in Isaiah 66:21 “...*I will also take them (Gentiles) for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord.*”

These passages should render the argument (as well as the heresy) moot, and yet in church after church, many of which claim to accept Scripture’s authority, its clear statements are ignored.

The proof that women’s ordination is a theological heresy is just as plain.

Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is His bride.

Since all priestly functions done by men ordained to the priestly office are done in the *persona Christi* in the “person of Christ,” when the priest stands at the altar he does so as *alter Christus* “another Christ.”

He does not become divine like Christ is, but he represents Christ and acts under and with Christ’s authority.

Since Christ is the bridegroom and the Church is His bride, and the priest at the altar is acting in the person of Christ, then a “woman priest” at the altar (or in any other ordained ministerial function) symbolizes a “same sex” relationship between Christ and His Church.

Much more could be taught on this, and yet the point is made without writing volumes. The heresy is that obvious. All one must do is believe what Scripture rightly divided and sound Patristic theology teaches.

Though imperfect because man is imperfect, Christ has ordered His Church to be ministered to, through and by men. What we must do is submit to His command, protect it from attack and perpetuate it to the continuation and building of the Church for the future.

Always remember brethren: “No proper priest, no proper sacraments.” The latter cannot be provided without the former.

St. Thomas Becket strove to guard the integrity of Christ’s bride. She was under attack from King Henry II and Becket strove to protect her.

By the gift of grace he was given by and in his consecration, Becket strove to defend Christ’s Bride with all his might unto his last breath.

In his example we see what we are called to do. May God give us the grace, courage and strength we need to do it.

One Church, One Lord, One Priest: Jesus Christ. ***Amen.***