

## What is Your Ministry in the Church? Part 2

### On the Meaning of Ministry

The word *ministry* has many connotations. Often it is associated with the job or duties of a parish priest. In looking at the tradition of the Church however, it is clear that there is no ministry in the Church other than Christ's ministry. This means that every aspect of Church life can be understood as a *ministry* of Christ. The obvious implication is that the clergy and the laity are both called to fulfill the ministry of Christ in the world, through the Church.

*Fr. John Ziioulas as professor of theology once said, "The Holy Spirit realizes the ministry of Christ as the ministry of the Church."*

The realization of the ministry of Christ within a given community has a lot to do with the members' willingness to engage in it. We all have received by virtue of our sacramental entrance into the Body of the Christ a calling to bring Christ's ministry to the world. The ministries that Christ enables us to do are the result of dying to ourselves and allowing the Life of Christ to reign in our hearts. Having taken the "ego" out of the picture (we can never say 'my ministry is...') allows Christ to be seen working through us - personal pride always distracts from the purity of the message. In summery, each member of the Church is a servant of Christ's ministry.

### The Problem of "burnout"

The pitfall of parishioners "burning out" is the result of losing sight that the empowerment to do the ministry of Christ comes always from him - not us! Christ is the *Anointed One* and we have become sharers in Christ's anointment by being joined to His Body (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann). Christ has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father (Rev 1:6). At our anointing in Chrismation, we receive not the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit as a Gift. We have become temples of God; consequently, the purpose of our life is to share in His life, His holiness, and His sanctification with the world.

### Christ makes us kings

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ruled creation. In the fall, they lost their kingship over Creation and became its slave. Christ has restored in us our Kingship. In our baptism, we come to share in the crucifixion of Christ so that we may be raised with Him. By taking up our Cross and following Christ's example, our kingship in Him is fulfilled. We are called to die daily to "*the world as an end in itself*" and found to be living for the Kingdom. His Kingdom is present NOW in the Church, it is in fact, *the* gift of the Church.

## Sunday is the Lord's Day

On Sundays, we assemble as *the* Church to manifest ourselves as kings of *the* King. Great care ought to be taken so that the distractions of our lives do not hinder the precious gift of our undivided attention that the Divine Liturgy deserves. Sunday, is the "Lord's day" it belongs to him and it requires of us the greatest respect. For whatever reasons it has become acceptable to arrive at any time during a Liturgy - this is fundamentally wrong. The text of the Liturgy implies that we are all present to give our "Amen!" to the priest's first words, "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages." If we find ourselves anywhere else but in Church on Sundays, we have allowed the world to enslave us and make us its servants.

## Christ makes us Priests

Another consequence of our sacramental entry into the Church is that Christ restores in us our priestly nature. As Christ has shown, one's *priestly nature* is fulfilled in *offering* and *sacrifice*. The *offering* involves our entire lives as we hear in the Liturgy, "Let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole lives unto Christ our God." Every decision of daily life becomes subject to the will of God. Consequently, our concern grows for sharing and witnessing the truth of Christ to others because no longer are we examples of worldly Christians following their own wills.

## The "Me Generation"

Fr. Schmemmann used the word "consumer" as the best expression of NOT realizing one's *priesthood* in Christ. Adam was the first *consumer* by taking what was not offered. In the same way, adults and children are led by marketing companies to become the "best" consumers possible. The lie being told by marketers is that possessing things leads to happiness. This shallow ethic has produced the present "Me Generation" that is characterized as egotistical, selfish, and prideful consumers. God did not create us as consumers but as people who *offer* - this is why Christ said, it is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

## Christ makes us Prophets.

The Prophet is the one who knows the will of God, can discern life's events and situations with divine Wisdom and is not fooled by the deception of the world and sin. Furthermore, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, we cannot become ministers of Christ's ministry. The prophetic role of church members is fulfilled in having the "eyes of Christ" to see the injustices of the world and the "legs" to put into action a solution. Injustices like that of poverty, orphans, widows and homelessness. We become prophetic having the "ears of Christ" to hear the pains and struggles of each other so that by listening we bear one another's burdens. We become prophetic having the

"mouth of Christ" learning self-control and instead of setting fires with our tongues, divine grace is heard extinguishing the anxiousness of others. Having the "mind of Christ", we can direct our personal talents for the building up of God's kingdom. Our time, talent and treasure finally become gifts back to Christ as we allow ourselves to fulfill the ministry of Christ in the world.

To Him be given all glory, honor, and worship. Amen.

+Fr. Andrew