

Gifts of Finest Wheat

Fall 2009 - Ecclesiology

November 12th, 2009

Session 7 – The Lay Faithful

- Prayer –
Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.
Let us pray.
**O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.**

- Questions/Clarifications up to this point? From the reading?
- Our goal this evening: Examine the role of the laity in the Church and the world with special emphasis on the documents of Vatican II.

- The laity: a definition
 - "The term 'laity' is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, are made sharers in their particular way in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, and have their own part to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the World." (CCC 897)
 - "...the need for a definition of the lay faithful's vocation and mission in *positive terms*...In giving a response to the question "Who are the lay faithful", the Council went beyond previous interpretations which were predominantly negative. Instead it opened itself to a decidedly positive vision and displayed a basic intention of asserting *the full belonging of the lay faithful to the Church and to its mystery*" (CL 9),
 - "What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature" (LG 31).
 - "They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven" (LG 31).
 - "*The "world" thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation*, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The Council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to

abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God" (*I Cor 7:24*). On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world" (CL 15).

- “The lay faithful's *position in the Church*, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character” (CL 15).
- The dignity of the lay faithful
 - Rooted in Baptism
 - “Incorporation into Christ through faith and Baptism is the source of being a Christian in the mystery of the Church” (CL 9).
 - “...sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection” (LG 32).
 - “...the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God” (CL 10).
 - “...all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ” (LG 32).
- The vocation/mission of the laity
 - Misunderstood
 - Positing a struggle between hierarchy and laity
 - “In particular, two temptations can be cited which they have not always known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world” (CL 2).
 - “Holiness, then, must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation within the Church” (CL 17).
 - “The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself” (LG 33).

- “Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth” (LG 33).
- “...it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will...” (CCC 898)
- “They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity” (LG 31).
- “Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer” (LG 31).
- “The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life” (CCC 899)
- “...to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth...” (CCC 900)
- Priest
 - “For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”
 - “In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord.”
 - “And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives.”
- Prophet
 - “He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the sense of the faith [*sensus fidei*] and the grace of the word.”
 - “Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, "that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life." For lay people, "this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world."
 - “For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of

God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth” (LG 35).

- This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers . . . or to the faithful.
- “Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world” (LG 35).
- "In accord with the knowledge, competence, and preeminence which they possess, [lay people] have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church, and they have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard to the integrity of faith and morals and reverence toward their pastors, and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons."
- King
 - Christ communicated to his disciples the gift of royal freedom, so that they might "by the self-abnegation of a holy life, overcome the reign of sin in themselves"
 - The laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them.
 - "...in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God's dominion."
 - "Serving Christ in their fellow men...to serve is to reign" (LG 36).
 - "They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty" (LG 36).
- In Relation to the Hierarchy
 - "The laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church" (LG 37)
 - "They should openly reveal to them their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church" (LG 37)
 - "Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church,

allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative” (LG 37).

- Questions?
- Announcements
 - Next time – Mariology
 - Reading for next time
 - Winter session: Church History
- Closing prayer –