



# Priestly People

SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE

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**Only PRAYER can lift us, give us that glimpse of God's view,  
which sees gateways and bridges where before we saw  
nothing but walls and dead-end streets.**

## The objects of our devotion

There is an innate drive in humans to worship and adore. We instinctively know that there is something or someone who is ultimately responsible for the way things are, however, real or vague that awareness may be.

It is the effect of our profound sense of incompleteness and vulnerability. We feel a personal fragility in the presence of the unpredictability of the world in relation to our lives. We feel a great need to understand ourselves and the world around us and to control them. We are surrounded by mystery and are always asking the question “why?” of things. In the quest for meaning we fasten on whatever seems to satisfy that deep curiosity and hunger. God has made us this way. It is the restlessness about which St. Augustine speaks.

Those objects, persons, or experiences which relieve that restlessness can quickly become the focus of our devotion. In effect they become the focus of our devotion. In effect they become our god. They offer a self-evaluation by satisfying, however temporarily, our basic yearning for security, affection, variety and esteem. Since they are not the true god, they become our idols, and we are their devoted servants.

Our culture is highly skilled in manipulating those deep desires and insecurities. The advertising media and political campaigns are notorious examples. They artificially stimulate fears and anxieties and then offer products or programs to relieve the insecurity. The relief does not last long since our culture is omnipresent and is constantly generating new worries and offering ways to control them and find peace. It is very difficult to get free from this process since it is completely pervasive, and we are always under its influence.

Gerald G., May, MD, in his book *Addiction and Grace*, uses the word addiction to describe the compulsive means we use to calm restlessness. He says, “To be alive is to be addicted and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace. (page 11)

He further states: Psychologically, addiction uses up desire. It is like a psychic malignancy, sucking our life energy into specific obsessions and compulsions, leaving less and less energy available for other people and other pursuits. Spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The objects of our addiction become false gods. They are what we worship, what we attend to, where we give our time and energy to instead of love.

Addiction, then, displaces and supplants God’s love as the source and object of our deepest true desire. (page 13)

Many people have come to an understanding that an abundance of wealth or possessions will not make them content. Oftentimes they join the ranks of the seekers in quest of a spirituality which will satisfy their longings. Hence, we see the proliferation of programs of meditation, psychological self-improvement, new-age philosophies and new religious

movements that offer methods to contact and get guidance from the transcendent realm. The spiritual culture around us is very reminiscent of the words of St. Paul, “[For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and be diverted to myths” (2 Timothy 4: 3, 4)

The prophets were constantly warning God’s people against the idols of their neighbors. There was a natural desire in the people to want to be just like everyone else and worship the same gods. We have the same condition in our own day. It is hard to be set apart from the rest of the world for religious reasons. The temptation is great to blend in and have the same attitudes and values as the rest of society. Our belief that salvation lies only in Jesus Christ and Him crucified (cf. I-Corinthians 1:23), whom we are to imitate (cf. Luke 9:23f), sets us at variance from the rest of the world, even to the point of making us look foolish and inviting its ridicule, if not persecution.

The psalmist derides the idols of his day, saying “the idols of the nations are silver and gold, the handiwork of men. They have mouths but speak not; they have eyes but see not; they have ears, but they hear not, not is there breath in their mouths” (Ps 135: 15-17)

The idols of our day, however, are constantly in our face with their incessant demands. They do have speech, sight, hearing and are interactive. In many cases the talking idol is enshrined in living rooms and bedrooms proclaiming a constant litany and catechism of the world and chronicling the advance of the kingdom of evil. Unfortunately, the beliefs of many Catholics are shaped more by the media than by the teachings of the church.

It takes consistent prayer and contemplation of the word of God to stay in the state of conversion, enabling us consistently to turn away from the things of the world and toward the things of God. That we ensure that the objects of our devotion is the true God and not the seductive substitutes which our culture offers.

I will close by citing the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican II. The first word, ONLY, is very important:

Only by the light of faith and by meditating on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), seek His will in every event, see Christ in all men, whether they be close to us or strangers, and make correct judgements about the true meaning and value of temporal things, both in themselves and in their relation to man’s final goal. (no. 4)

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# Christian Maturity and Discernment of Spirits

“God wants to look into his son and see the beauty, harmony and loving cooperation of all creation. We are all members of that son. This is what it means to be living in the Spirit.”

The desire for freedom is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. This is so true that one of the severest punishments our society can inflict on its transgressors is to deprive them of their period of freedom for a period of time. Somehow, being free is connected with what it means to be human. We must be free in order to seek the purpose of life and existence. Some of those deep purposes are peace in our hearts and minds and a sense of harmony with one another and the world around us.

Since we are all children of God, the goals of human life will only be achieved when we dedicate our freedom to act in conformity with that reality. Nothing less than living that truth in the concrete details of our lives will make us free, content and fulfilled.

Scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God (Gen 1: 26-27). Moreover, we are told that Jesus is the image of God and that “in him were created all things” (Col 1: 15, 16). Those references to image are usually taken to mean resembling or appearing similar. There is another way of understanding “in the image”. It can be seen as a type of spatial description. “in” would mean “within”. We are created within the second person of the Trinity who is the image of God.

Our life task individually and collectively is to do what the second person of the Trinity does namely, reflect God back into himself. Thus, when the Father looks on the Son who proceeds from him, He sees himself mirrored perfectly without any distortion. The relationship between them can only be love itself, Father loving Son and Son loving Father with infinite love, the Holy Spirit. When the Father sees the Son, he sees all the rest of created reality as well, including ourselves, existing in and sharing the life of the Son now made human. He justly expects to see us doing what the Son is doing in one harmonious whole.

The second person of the Trinity incarnate, Jesus Christ, describes this relationship in human terms, “...a son cannot do anything on his own but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also” (John 5:19)

We are all members of that son, and when we do what he is doing, glorifying the Father, we fulfill our being.

Unfortunately, all the rest of created reality does not reflect back to God his glory in truthful love. Much of creation is in rebellion against God and is equivalently saying “Now that you have created me, I will not serve your interests. I prefer to do my own.” The parable of the murderous tenant farmers who eventually killed the son and heir describes the situation (Matt 21: 33-47)

We cannot be inside of God acting against his interests and still have peace. The only possibility for such mutinous self-deifying disposition is to go to a place of our own creation, somewhere, figuratively outside of God. It is the outer darkness where confusion, violence, exploitation, egoism, and various terrors reign. Christian tradition calls that place hell, whether it be here or in the hereafter.

The children of God, on the other hand, are able to discern the voice and obey the call of God who tells us how to reflect back to him in the most perfect way possible the truth of his being. This done particularly by loving God, ourselves and others.

God wants to look into his son and see the beauty, harmony and loving cooperation of all creation. It is his will for us that we be that way. This is what it means to be living in the spirit.

We must learn to discern the intentions of God at every moment of our lives. That requires avoidance of serious states of sin and observance of the ten commandments and the precepts and teachings of the church. Those are the minimum conditions we must follow in order to reflect God.

Jesus affirms this in the story of the wealthy young man who wanted to inherit eternal life (Mark 10: 17-22). Jesus told him to keep the commandments. When he said he had been observing them, Jesus invited him to a life of discipleship and with the young man, Jesus calls us to a much higher standard of conduct and more intimate relationship with him by calling us to be “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). We are told, against all our natural inclinations and common sense, to extend love and mercy even to our enemies because the Father loves them also. In other words, He is calling us to Christian maturity, a life of holiness. This requires an extraordinary freedom from attachments, things, prejudices, relationships and preconceptions about what God desires minute by minute. Tragically, the young man failed the call to holiness.

Holiness is the state of being spiritually mature, that is one with God in intention and action, discerning the voice of God from all other voices, being free to follow it, and rejecting all other spirits not of God. The parable of the shepherd whose flock recognizes his voice and rejects all others illustrates this point perfectly (John 10: 1-18).

In the case of a person who is intent on the things of God, the voice of God is heard as peace, a calmness spirit and positive joy. Contemplated actions are referred to God to see if they are originating from Him and then checked afterward for continuing serenity indicating God’s approval. The saints made frequent examinations of consciousness to achieve this unity and harmony. The mature Christian is within the image of God freely and happily reflecting beauty, peace, and love, back to God and to the rest of creation.

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