

Priestly Soul – Soul of Christ

All men and women should have a priestly soul, and are called to share intimately in the sentiments of Christ's Heart. This teaching of Saint Josemaria is explained in this article.

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The catechisms that in the past were used to prepare children for their First Holy Communion often included the following question: "Why did God make you?" The answer was clear and easy to

memorize: "God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him forever in the next."

This contains the essential truth about our life here on earth. But the *Compendium of the present Catechism of the Catholic Church* spells out an important consequence: "God created [man and woman] to know, serve and love him, to offer all of creation in this world in thanksgiving back to him, and to be raised up to life with him in heaven."[1]

In other words, the creation of mankind, our being called into existence, entails directing our activity in this world to God and offering all creation to him in thanksgiving. Since God has associated mankind in his work of creation, all human activity should somehow cooperate with and reflect

the goodness and beauty of God's action. "Man was created in God's image and was commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and holiness; he was to acknowledge God as maker and relate himself and the totality of creation to him."[2]

But after original sin, our task of cooperating in God's plan met with an insurmountable obstacle: the lack of rectitude in the human heart. As the Bible narrates, instead of cooperating with God in building up the universe, we passed on to it our own disorder, building up a selfish world. Then, in his great mercy, God decided to send us his Son to restore once again to creation rectitude of life, justice of heart, words and deeds that would be truly pleasing to God. And we Christians were made part of that work of Redemption, eternally foreseen by God. Christ's sacrifice and his grace restored God to us and

made it possible for our actions to cooperate in the salvation of mankind.

The spirit of Opus Dei stresses the call to cooperate with Christ in the work of creation and redemption. It also shows us a specific way to do so: by carrying out our daily duties as perfectly as possible, in our ordinary work, family life, and social relations. God asks us to offer him our ordinary life each day, recognizing his presence in a thousand little details.

And that demands of us a deep interior disposition: the supernatural desire to serve God in what we do, to bring to him the people we know, to glorify him, and, in order to do so, to free ourselves from the failings that have their origin in sin. The Holy Spirit builds up in our soul little by little, if we respond to his action, a specific "way of being" that proceeds

from Christ and connects us to his own Priesthood.

A priestly soul is found in every Christian, since "through Baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, [so that] "everything that we do can be an expression of our obedience to God's will."[3] Therefore every morning, as we begin each day, we tell our Lord that we want this new day to be for him, and we offer him our life, our heart, our work, our entire being.

Grounded in grace

We can please God and make all our deeds reflect his goodness and charity, not by virtue of our own merits but through the grace of Christ that justifies us. As St. Paul says, *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*[4]

Therefore the priestly soul is born from above,[5] from the fact of being God's children; it infuses into us the life of Christ, the Eternal Priest.

Acting with a priestly soul requires often overcoming ourselves, going beyond the expenditure of effort or dedication that might appear reasonable. It demands setting aside or resolving the difficulties that arise from our character or from other circumstances, when we see that something is needed for the glory of God or the good of our neighbor. It requires finding the time necessary to carry this out, or overcoming our fear of not being able to do it.

These are things in which we have to exercise ourselves daily, setting ourselves small targets, broadening our generosity in small points, and not giving in to discouragement when we realize that we weren't able or didn't want to do it. Thus we will lay firm foundations for our own

interior life. Our generosity will never seem enough to us if we look towards the goal that always surpasses us: if we measure ourselves in the mirror of Jesus' life.

Christ's priestly soul is clearly reflected in his brief statement about why he has come into this world: *the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*^[6] It is as though Jesus wanted to make clear his determination to not hold back anything in order to free many people from sin and give them life, so that his Father would be glorified by their salvation.

Besides Jesus, we can also be certain that our Lady never said "enough," since she was guided by her desire to be the handmaid of the Lord in everything. Mary accompanied Jesus on the Cross more closely than anyone else, and our Lord associated

her to his Priesthood in a very special way that was above that of any other human being.

Our Lady was able to exercise her priestly soul so perfectly because she was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we should not contemplate her example with merely human eyes, for our imagination would be overwhelmed by such great renunciation and sacrifice. We would conclude that this path was impossible for us and, consciously or unconsciously, seek out easier paths.

The Church's liturgy says that the Holy Spirit, *who has been given to us*, is "Father of the poor, Giver of gifts, Light of hearts."[7] If we are faithful and trust in him, we will also obtain all his gifts: "the reward of virtue, the prize of salvation, everlasting joy."[8] And thus every opportunity we get to exercise our priestly soul will fill us

with joy. Precisely when it is difficult, we will feel inexplicably a greater happiness that comes from within, from a *spring of water welling up to eternal life*.[9]

"Communicatio Christi"

Have this mind in yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus,[10] says St. Paul. The Gospel often reveals to us our Lord's desires and ways of thinking. We see that the first place in his soul is always for God the Father. He is consumed with the desire to do what the Father asks of him, with zeal for the House of God. This zeal is shown when still a young boy, when he expressed in the Temple his imperious need to be about his Father's business. Years later he declared that his Father's Will was the food that he lived on, his nourishment, and that his soul burned with the desire to see the divine plan fulfilled.[11]

Impelled by this zeal, our Lord Jesus Christ ardently desired mankind's conversion, urging them to open themselves to God's love, to charity with one another. He saw the hunger for happiness in people's hearts, often locked by the chains of sin: Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the woman taken in adultery, are eloquent witnesses of this.

Human needs, poverty and suffering moved his most loving Heart deeply. We see this in the raising of his friend Lazarus, of the daughter of Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, and the raising of the son of the widow at Naim; we see his concern for the misery of the lepers, the man born blind, the woman with the hemorrhage who had spent all her money.

Christ valued children's purity of heart, the Canaanite woman's humility, his disciples' unselfishness.

He was deeply touched by his followers' friendship, and rejoiced to see them grow in faith and share in his concerns. He told them: *You are those who have continued with me in my trials.*^[12] He must have been greatly hurt by the betrayal of Judas, the apostasy of those who deserted him, the hard-heartedness of his enemies. Jesus wept at the harsh fate that awaited Jerusalem.

We have tried to fathom Christ's soul, because in it we find the main features of the priestly soul that all Christians should possess, sharing in the longing to redeem that led Jesus to die for us on the Cross. A priestly soul involves having the same sentiments as Christ the Priest. It means seeking to fulfil God's will at every moment, offering our entire life to God the Father, in union with Christ, in order to co-redeem with him, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit. These sentiments are poured

out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is, as St. Irenaeus said, *communicatio Christi*, the communication of Jesus and thus the transmission of his inner life, his thoughts and desires, which become more and more our own. "The Church is the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, that is, the communication of Christ."[13]

In our prayer we nurture our desire to make this a reality. In this effort, we will often find that we are helped by reading the Gospel, making an effort to place ourselves in those scenes and to look at Jesus, at what he wants to tell us, what he has in his Heart. And we will do so even if we have to start by telling him that our head is empty, our heart cold and insensitive, or by asking him to grant us at least the desire to have the desire that Saint Josemaria encouraged us to ask for. If we do so with humility, certain that we are

asking for the greatest good, our Lord will take pity on our poverty; he will reward our faith and work the miracle in us. His divine power, which transformed the lives of the people in the Gospels, will imprint his own redemptive longing on our souls.

Thus, looking at the world, at those around us, and at our own lives with the eyes Christ lends us, we will ask him humbly to help us to do what is right, what is pleasing to him, to serve him in our work, and to bring the people around us to him without being afraid of wearing ourselves out.

In our times of prayer, and in the whole of our lives, we turn our eyes to our Mother Mary, and beg her that these holy ambitions may grow impetuously in the hearts of all Christians, that we may allow ourselves to be transformed by the

Soul of Christ until we are truly
conformed to the image of God's Son,
in order that he might be the first-
born among many brethren.[14]

[1] *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 67.

[2] Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 34.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, 96.

[4] *Rom* 5:5.

[5] Cf. *Jn* 3:3.5.

[6] *Mk* 10:45.

[7] Sequence *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] *Jn* 4:14.

[10] *Phil* 2:5.

[11] Cf. *Jn* 4:34; *Lk* 12:49-50.

[12] *Lk* 22:28.

[13] St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 24, 1.

[14] *Rom* 8:29.

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