

## PRIMARY PRIESTLY APOSTOLATE\*

It is likely that a large number of priests, especially those ordained many years ago, were puzzled and somewhat shocked to read in the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* that "priests as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the Gospel of God to all" (no. 4) and in Pope Paul's *Ecclesiam Suam* that "preaching is the primary apostolate." Some priests may even have interpreted these statements as an implicit downgrading of the priestly ministry of the sacraments and, in particular, of the ministry of the Eucharist.

Did not the Council of Trent, following the medieval theologians, expressly define the Catholic priesthood in terms of the Eucharist and the Mass? And even Vatican Council II stated that the Eucharist is at once the source and the summit of the Christian life; *a fortiori*, of the priesthood. How does one explain the apparent conflict of emphasis?

In order to clarify and defend the statements on preaching and at the same time to avoid erroneous conclusions and incorrect pastoral applications, a distinction is necessary. The Eucharist enjoys the primacy of excellence and therefore it transcends all other sacraments. But the preaching of the Gospel has primacy in the work of evangelization, in the apostolate of the salvation of souls. Thus, when Christ gave his apostles their mission, his mandate to them was that they should preach the Gospel and baptize those who believe. But Paul asks: "How shall they believe if they do not have the Gospel preached to them?"

The preaching of the Gospel, therefore, has the primacy in the priestly apostolate — preaching unto faith, faith, unto baptism, and baptism unto reception of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the summit or goal to which evangelization leads; it can then become the source from which the priest fashions

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and directs the Christian community. It is not, however, the source of unity of faith as some modern ecumenists would have us think. Faith derives from the hearing of the good news of the Gospel as proclaimed by the preacher; then comes baptism, as Christ taught; and then comes the invitation to the table of the Eucharist.

The sad fact is that today, as yesterday, there are still far too many priests who do not preach the Gospel. Even some who preach, are not preaching the Gospel. Some of them are the most vocal in attacking what they call the Tridentine concept of a cultic priest, but what they opt for is not a preacher of the Gospel; they seem to want the contemporary priest to be a composite of social worker, militant demonstrator against society's evils, and charismatic leader. Now, there have been priests — and even saints — in the Church who were one or all of these things, but they always acted within the context of Gospel teaching and with an uncanny ability to discern the spirit by which they were led.

Here we are touching on a nerve in the crisis of priestly ministry. We should bless the day that priests began to speak out and to act against the moral evils of modern society. We should emulate those dedicated priests who are sincerely trying to adapt their preaching of the Gospel to topics and problems that preoccupy the minds and hearts of their parishioners. But there is such a thin line between preaching the Gospel in this way and letting oneself be so over-whelmed by the difficulties and evils of modern society that one's preaching becomes pulpit-thumping harangue that does nothing but reveal the frustration and anger of the preacher. Most of our people know the problems as well or better than we do, and perhaps there are some who could come forth with better possible solutions. But what they want to hear from the preacher of the Gospel is an application of Christ's teaching both to their own lives and the life of society at large. They may be willing to listen to a priest's views on social problems in a discussion group or social gathering; they may listen attentively to a priest's philosophical or theological opinions; but when that priest is in the pulpit as proclaimer of the Gospel, they expect to hear him speak not in his own name, but in the name of Christ and the Church.

It is practically overwhelming to think of the conversion and renewal that would occur if all our priests would commit themselves unswervingly to preach the Gospel faithfully at all the Sunday Masses. And if you tend to doubt this, then just remember what the Twelve accomplished by preaching the Good News unto repentance and conversion.

• **JORDAN AUMANN, O.P.**

## **MISAL NA PANG-ARAW-ARAW**

**Ikatlong Pagkalimbag**

**Batay sa huling pagbabago sa Liturhiya**

**Isinalin ni FR. EXCELSO GARCIA, OP**  
Pamantasan ng Santo Tomas, Maynila

Mga nilalaman: Bagong Ordinaryo ng Misa, Introito, Kolekta, Panalangin sa alay, Komunyon, Poskomunyon, (ang mga Pagbasang hango sa Benal na Kasulatan, na kasalukuyan isinasalin ng may-akda, ay ipalilimbag sa isang nakahiwalay na aklat).

**MABIBILI SA LIMBAGAN NG PAMANTASAN  
NG SANTO TOMAS, MAYNILA**