

Why I Am Catholic

...The priesthood.

Not only the ministerial priesthood, but the universal (common) priesthood as well. "Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the church 'a kingdom, priests for his God and Father.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1546)

"The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate 'each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ.' While being 'ordered one to another,' they differ essentially. . . While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—, **the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood.** . . The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church." (1547)

In the common priesthood, the baptized are called to offer the sacrifice of their lives; to imitate the sacrifice of Christ by giving their lives completely to God. This sacrifice requires a surrender—I offer my life, my will, my time, all that I am and all that I have. Through the ministerial priesthood Christ offers His own sacrifice. "Now the minister, by reason of his sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself." (1548)

"The ministerial priesthood has the task not only of representing Christ—Head of the Church—before the assembly of the faithful, but also of acting in the name of the whole Church when presenting to God the prayer of the Church, and above all when offering the Eucharistic sacrifice." (1552) This is an elevation and a perfection of the Old Testament priesthood where "priests are 'appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.'" 1539) "Priests by the anointing of the Holy Spirit are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head." (1563)

In the Mass, the Church celebrates the perfect sacrifice of Christ—the offering of Himself thru the Last Supper, the Cross, and the Resurrection. Christ works through the ministerial priesthood in a special way to make present the sacrifice of His Body and Blood. This we receive and then become more united to Him, His Sacrifice, and the fullness of His grace.

"The sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a 'sacred power' which is none other than that of Christ. The exercise of this authority must therefore be measured against the model of Christ, who by love made himself the least and the servant of all. 'The Lord said clearly that concern for his flock was proof of love for him.'" (1551) "The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are 'consecrated to be. . . a holy priesthood.'" (1546) Some are then "set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1) and called to bring Christ forth in a special way. "Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representatives before God. . . One does not take this honor on his own initiative, but only when called by God as Aaron was." Heb 5:1,4)