



# A Woman in Support of the All-Male Priesthood

by Kathleen Laplante

In this day of gender equality, people are surprised to hear that I, as a woman, think only men should be priests. I am even surprised at times, since I used to be a women's libber who thought all women should be allowed to do anything men can do. However, when I looked at the biology and theology underlying the priesthood, I let go of my emotion-based demands that women should be priests too.

Biologically, it is clear that men and women are different. Our bodies and our psyches attest to that. They also attest to the reality that we are not just different, but we are different in a complementary manner. That is, we fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Both are needed for a union to occur. Both are different, but both are intrinsically and equally important. In fact, if the pieces were the same, the puzzle would never get made and we would never see the bigger picture.

So it is for men and women. Our different but complementary natures are vital for us to see the bigger picture, i.e. the propagation and salvation of mankind. This in itself does not mean that women cannot be priests, but it does allow for the possibility that the priesthood could be for only one gender.

Theologically, one might argue that women can be priests because Jesus was simply following the cultural and religious norms of His time, going along with only men being in leadership positions, but not intending that choice to be definitive. The evidence, however, shows that this is not true. In fact, Jesus did the opposite in matters of justice.

He was countercultural when He needed to be. For example, He ate and socialized with sinners and tax collectors. (See Mark 2:13-17. In particular, see verse 16, which says, "Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" He also talked in public to the

Samaritan woman at the well. (See John 4:4-42. In particular, see verse 27, which says, "At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman...") He healed people on the Sabbath. (See Mark 3:1-6. In particular, see verse 2, which says, "They watched him closely to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him.") Lastly, He and His disciples ate without washing their hands. [See Matthew 15:2, which says, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the

which bread and wine are changed into the Real Body and the Real Blood of Jesus Christ. It is called Transubstantiation, and it is the remembrance of the Last Supper. It is also the remembrance of Jesus dying on the cross and His Resurrection. "Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you... Drink of this all of you, this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins... make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ... And that which is in this Chalice the precious Blood of Your Christ."

This remembrance was known as a memorial in the Jewish community. (Jesus was Jewish.) It is believed that in a memorial, the event of the past is made present with the event of today. All time exists and eternity is accessed. The people in the event today are joined with the people in the event from the past. This means that at each Divine Liturgy, the priest literally joins Jesus at the Last Supper, on the cross at Calvary, and at His Resurrection. He becomes "another Christ" for his congregation.

It follows, then, that since Jesus was a man, the priest would be a man as well. Of course, one might argue that this is not necessarily true since God does not care about the gender of the person and can supersede it, even for the Last Supper and all that followed. We as Catholics, however, have always believed that our bodies are sacred and our genders are purposeful in God's plan here on earth and thereafter. So that argument is not viable.

Another explanation of why Jesus intended men to be priests is related to the imagery in the Old Testament. In the prophetic literature in particular, God relates to Israel as a husband relates to his wife. Since Jesus is that same God made incarnate in the New Testament, and He came not to abolish the Old Testament but to fulfill it, it follows that the imagery of God as hus-



elders? They do not wash (their) hands when they eat a meal.]"

Back then, these acts were forbidden and unheard of, but Jesus performed them when it was prudent to do so. Therefore, it is not reasonable to conclude that Jesus simply restricted Himself to cultural and religious norms when He instituted the priesthood. No, He had other reasons for choosing men instead of women.

Some of those reasons can be deduced from the Divine Liturgy in

band and Israel as bride would continue. Not only would it continue with Jesus; it would also continue with each priest who is another Christ in the Church. Their roles as husbands and grooms in God's plan of salvation would warrant priests to be men.

Further evidence supports the belief that Jesus did not intend women to be priests. As seen previously, He instituted the priesthood with men even when it was in His power to include women. Additionally, He had many women followers and supporters, but He never appointed one of them to be one of the twelve Apostles, who were the first priests. Then there were the many women who assisted the Apostles themselves, but none were ever ordained as priests. Lastly, there was Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin. She is and has always been considered higher in stature than any man on earth, but Jesus never conferred the priesthood upon her. She was Queen of

the Apostles, but she was not one of them.

It is this type of evidence that leads the Catholic Church to conclude that God, not man, mandated an all-male priesthood. Because God mandated it, man cannot change it, and that is one reason why the Church says it is not in Her power to ordain women into the priesthood. Another reason is our obligation as Catholics to faithfully preserve what Christ and the Apostles taught. Since the ordination of men only has been constantly and without exception lived out by the Church always and everywhere (even those Eastern Churches which disagree with us in other important aspects of Christianity believe God mandated men to be priests), it is by reason that it cannot be changed. We must not acquiesce to popular trends or ways of the world.

This does not mean that men have all the power in the Catholic Church,

and women are less than. On the contrary, Jesus taught that all roles are meant to be roles of service, not power. In that case, the only power involved is the power of God, not the power of an individual or group. Thus, every role is equally important and necessary.

So women (and children, for that matter) have equally critical roles in the Church, even though they cannot be priests. Having said that, I imagine there are duties currently held by priests that women should be carrying out. I believe, however, that the core role of the priest, which is to be "another Christ" in celebrating the sacraments, should always remain with only men who have been ordained as priests. †

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*Kathleen Laplante attends Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Worcester, MA. She can be reached at [klaplante2@yahoo.com](mailto:klaplante2@yahoo.com)*

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