

# Thoughts on the Priesthood

As I give thanks for the half-century of Korepiscopa P. A. Paulose's priestly ministry, my thoughts turn to the meaning of Christian priesthood itself.

According to the faith of the Christian Church, all baptized Christians, male or female, clergy or laity, participate in the priesthood of Christ. When we were anointed with the holy Chrism at the time of our baptism, the Church sang: As Aaron the High Priest was anointed so is this child now baptized also anointed.

Priesthood is a special grace – the power to offer prayers and sacrifices on behalf of others. In fact, according to the Christian faith, there is only one true High Priest – Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the one who offers the only effective sacrifice, i.e. of his own bodily life, to the Father on behalf of the whole creation.

Christian priesthood is sharing in the priesthood of Christ through becoming members of His Body, the Church. All who are members of the Church thus share in Christ's priesthood, and join with Him in offering the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist, which in turn is a participation in the eternal self-offering of Christ for the world.

All members of the Church – priests and lay people, men and women; adults and children – all participate in Christ's priesthood by virtue of incorporation into the Body of Christ, and of Chrismation (Mooron) which is understood as Christification, i.e. of being made a Messiah, Christ or Anointed One through participation in the Messiahhood of our Lord. And all of us are duty bound to pray for the whole world and to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice for the whole of Creation.

What then is the meaning of a special priesthood, in which Bishops, Priests and Deacons alone participate? This is a specialized ministry within the general priesthood of the whole Church, and has a special function attached to it.

It is a group ministry – of a bishop, and several presbyters and deacons attached to him. The community is a visible, sacramental presence of Christ, with his apostles and disciples, fulfilling the double ministry of good shepherd and High Priest.

The Bishop, and the priest by delegation from him, is a manifestation of Christ himself in the midst of his people. That is why the church insists on a disciplined and holy life for the clergy, more even than the lay people who are also, as sharing in Christ's body, required to be disciplined and holy. At the Eucharist he stands in place of Jesus Christ the great High Priest, offering the Sacrifice of the Church for the whole of creation. During the other times also he

fulfils the function of High Priest in that he is always engaged in prayer – interceding for the world and especially for his people. The Bishop is also the visible presence of Jesus Christ the good shepherd -feeding his people with the word of God, healing their wounds, guiding them to green pastures, keeping them from falling into the ditch, protecting them from the wolves. In both these functions, i.e. as Jesus Christ the High Priest and as Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, the priest or presbyter always helps the bishop and when authorized, acts in place of the bishop. The presbyter also presides at the Eucharist and looks after the people as the Bishop's vicar or authorized representative.

It is a pity that today the role of the priest as an “icon of holiness” and as “manifest presence of Jesus Christ” is not well understood in our Churches. Quite often we give this great honour to undeserving people and thereby bring dishonour to the name of Christ. In the early period, it was always the most learned, holy, cultured and devout people in a community that would be chosen for ordination to the clergy. Even today the spiritual life of a Church is heavily dependent on the high standards and qualities of the clerical cadres.

We should be grateful that we have good priests like P. A. Paulose Korepiscopa who by their life and ministry bring to us the presence and the power of Christ.

50 years is a long period in anyone's ministry. It is a particular blessing from God that has enabled Paulose Achan to complete five decades in the priesthood. Let us thank God for his ministry and pray that he may be spared many more years for an even more fruitful ministry.