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The Priesthood Series
Article 3 – What does a priest do?

The most basic definition of a priest is a mediator between God and men. This is what we see in priests throughout every time and culture. The priest offers sacrifice to God, and sends the blessing of God to His people.

More specifically, Catholic priests have two major duties: Preaching, and celebrating the Sacraments.

Those are duties for all priest. Beyond that, a priest may exercise his priesthood and a variety of specific “jobs”, such as a parish priest, a teacher, a hospital chaplain, etc. However, the identity and primary duties of a priest are universal and do not depend upon his particular job.

The Church teaches that priests “*have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all. In this way they fulfill the command of the Lord: ‘Go therefore into the whole world preaching the Gospel to every creature’*” (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4). It likewise states that priests fulfill their “*principle function*” in celebrating the Eucharist (cf. PO, 12). So on the one hand, the priest’s “*primary duty*” is to preach the Gospel, while on the other hand his “*principle function*”, is to celebrate the Eucharist.

While at first this might seem like a contradiction, the two actually are in perfect harmony. If the preaching function comes first in the chronological order, it follows that the Eucharistic Liturgy must count as the culmination of priestly action. And this makes perfect sense, for, “*How can they call on the one of whom they have not heard...faith comes by hearing*” (Romans 10:14,17), and the purpose of all faith and calling on God is Communion with God: “*That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3).

And we see these two duties of the priest come together perfectly in the Mass. The *first part* of the Mass is the preaching of the Word of God, and the *second part* of the Mass is the celebration of Eucharist. Just as a priest’s duty of preaching leads people to Christ, so too in the Mass the celebration of the Word leads us to Christ in the Eucharist.

As the Synod of Bishops in 1971 said, “*The ministry of the Word, if rightly understood, leads to the sacraments and to the Christian life, as it is practiced in the visible community of the Church and in the world....Unity between evangelization and sacramental life is always proper to the ministerial priesthood and must be carefully kept in mind by every priest.*”

Other duties of the priest include: Shepherding the faithful; Presenting the needs and prayers of the faithful to God, and uniting the prayers of the faithful to that of Christ; Exercising the ministry of alleviation and reconciliation for the sick and sinners; etc. In everything, the nature of the priesthood is one of service. In imitation of the Lord, a priest must serve like the Lord, and for the glory of the Lord.

In conclusion, the priest is a mediator between God and men. As Scripture says, there is “*one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ*” (1 Tim 2:5), and the priest stands *in the person of Christ* as he offers prayers “*for everyone—petitions, intercessions, and thanksgiving*” (1 Tim 2:1). The priest is a mediator through his participation in the mediation of Christ.