21 C

MDP of God

I want to do something a little different in my homily today—I want to help you understand how the Catholic Church fulfills all that God promised- for when the Savior would come into the world—specifically the priesthood

In our 1st reading from the Prophet Isaiah—the prophet is speaking about how God’s Word would go to many nations throughout the world

At the time of Isaiah God’s people were the people of the 12 tribes of Israel—but the Prophet today says, “*I know their works and their thoughts, and* ***I come to gather nations of every language****; they shall come and see my glory.”*

So the Prophet is looking forward to the saving work of Jesus when God’s family covenant bonds would be extended to all nations

And notice the last line in our 1st reading today—the Prophet says, “Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the LORD.”

You see in the OT— there were three levels of priesthood

In Exodus 19 we see God say that He is making His people into a “kingdom of priests”

SO in the OT all the people were in one sense priests—they could all participate in the offering of sacrifices to God

We also see in the OT—a ministerial priesthood

Some sacrifices could only be offered by a ministerial priest—others, like “cereal offerings” could be made by others

Early in the OT—the Fathers and the 1st born sons were the priests of the family

 So we see Noah building an altar and offering sacrifices

 We see Abraham build an altar and offer sacrifice

 We see Isaac build and altar and offer sacrifice

But in the OT there is a big change in the ministerial priesthood

When the Israelites are in the desert—*following the sin of the golden calf*—the priesthood is stripped from the fathers and 1st born sons and entrusted to the tribe of Levi [Number is all about this]

And even more—while all the Levites could help in the offering of sacrifices—the high priesthood is reserved to Aaron and his descendants

So in the OT we see the priesthood of the people—*the entire nation was a “nation of priests”*

But we also see a ministerial priesthood—that eventually was limited to those of the tribe of Levi

And we see the high priesthood—that was limited to Aaron and his descendants

So in today’s 1st reading—when the Prophet Isaiah says that people from all nations would become a part of God’s covenant family—and he says, “**some** of these I will take as priests and Levites”—he’s referring to the ministerial priesthood

How do we know that? [we see the three same levels of priesthood as in OT]

First we know it because in the NT it speaks of the priesthood of the people—*all of us through our baptism share in the priesthood of Christ*

So St Peter says in 1Peter2 “But you are “a chosen race, a royal **priesthood**, a holy nation, a people of his own…”

Revelation 1 vs 6 says, “who has made us into a kingdom, **priests** for his God and Father…”

So the NT speaks about all of us sharing in the priesthood of Christ through our baptism-the day you were baptized the priest or deacon anointed you with Chrism oil—so that you could share in the priesthood, the prophesy and the kingship of Christ

But the NT also speaks of Christ as the high priest—and it speaks of a ministerial priesthood

 We see the ministerial in John’s gospel at the Last Supper

Jesus at the Last Supper prays that the Apostles will be “consecrated”—*that’s an unusual word in the bible*

In the OT the only time that word was used was when something was dedicated to God—so once something was “consecrated” it could only be used for the sacred—if you used it for something ordinary it would be considered profane

The only other time that word “consecrate” is used was for the ordination of the OT priests

Also—one of the things necessary in the OT for a man who was to be ordained --- *he had to be washed right before being ordained*—and of course Jesus washes the Apostles at the Last Supper [He washes and consecrates them]

We also see the idea of the ministerial priesthood in the letter of St James—in the NT they referred to the priests as “presbyters”

So in James chapter 5 the Apostle tells us, *“**Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord,* *and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.”*

So notice—St James doesn’t say---just somebody anoint the sick person—No—only the “presbyters” are to anoint the person

He’s here speaking of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick—and notice that sacrament will give healing—it also brings forgiveness of sins—and it’s to be done by the presbyters---which we translate into English as “priest”

Also in the letter of Jude---St Jude in verses 10-12 says, “*But these people revile what they do not understand...* *Woe to them! They followed the way of Cain, abandoned themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.* *These are blemishes on your love feasts…”*

So notice here Jude is speaking of NT times—*he’s talking about people who are part of their communities*—and says some of them fell into “the rebellion of Korah”—what’s that?

Well if you go back to Numbers 16 and 17—and you see that Korah was a Levite—but he and his 250 followers are saying they should be able to be priests too---if you read Numbers 16 & 17 you’ll see that it doesn’t work out very well for Korah and his followers---in that God makes it clear there is a ministerial priesthood

But Jude says—there are people in NT times who have joined the “rebellion of Korah”—in other words there were evidently some NT Christians who were denying the NT priesthood [that didn’t last long because we se little record of it in Church history]

[We see in the letters of Timothy and Titus specific mentions of priesthood and ordination]

And we see in history—in both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches—the idea of the ministerial priesthood is very much a part of our faith

But in the 1500’s with the Protestant Reformation there was once again a denial of the idea of the ministerial priesthood

Most outside the visible bounds of the Catholic Church speak of the “priesthood of the people”---**as Catholics we believe in that too**

But many outside the Catholic Church deny the “ministerial priesthood”—*but in doing so they make fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in today’s 1st reading impossible!*—How’s that?

Because Isaiah says God will take “**some** of the people who come from the nations and make them priests”— and so just like in the OT all God’s people share in one sense in the priesthood--- but as in the OT there was also a ministerial priesthood—Isaiah says there was to be a ministerial priesthood in the NT as well—“***some of them will be priests..”***

Why is this important?

 Well we pray in the Our Father, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

**God’s Will matters**—**God’s plan matters** [A lot of people today think they have a better plan—but the truth is God’s plan is what matters]

And while there are people outside the visible bounds of the Catholic Church who are wonderful people and obviously have God’s grace operating in their lives --and are obviously seeking to respond to God’s grace to the best of their ability—*it doesn’t change the fact that in God’s plan* –**as taught in the bible**—as lived out for the first 1500 years of the Church universally—and is still lived out in the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches today---*God established a ministerial priesthood*—who celebrate sacraments that convey God’s saving grace [Orthodox refer to sacrament as “the mysteries”]

We need to recognize **the plan** of God—we need to strive to live out **God’s plan** in our lives---and we want to invite everyone—especially those who love Jesus—to embrace the fullness of God’s plan for the world (Millions who love Jesus—who’ve never received His Body and Blood)

And we want to recognize and celebrate the incredible gift of the priesthood and the other sacraments

*There has been a small percentage of priests who have brought great shame to the priesthood in recent years*---which has been so sad and tragic--- **but Jesus foresaw that**—He said, “scandals will inevitably come—and woe to those through whom that scandal comes…” (Luke 17 Douy-rheims translation)

The sins of some priests doesn’t change the plan of God—it doesn’t change the Will of God—*it doesn’t change the fact that the bible points us to the ministerial priesthood* **and the saving grace that comes to us in the sacraments**

One last point—in the early Church they referred to the presbyters as the priests and the Deacons as the Levites---fulfilling Isaiah 66 where God says He will take people from all nations and make some of them priests and Levites

My friends—let’s embrace the plan and Will of God—let’s celebrate His plan—and let’s seek to live by His plan all the days of our lives. Amen? Amen