

Take-Home: Session 11

A Kingdom of Priests · In the Person of Christ

What We Found

We finally asked whose "my" the priest speaks at the consecration: "this is MY body." As the priest's own sentence it is absurd; it only makes sense if Another is speaking through him, the true priest of every Mass doing what he did in the upper room. The Church calls this in persona Christi, and we found the phrase's address in the New Testament itself: 2 Corinthians 2:10, where Paul forgives "in the presence of Christ," en prosopo Christou, which the Latin Bible has rendered "in the person of Christ" since the late fourth century (we noted honestly that the Greek word spans face, presence, and person, that its sense in Paul is debated, and that the verse gives the phrase its genealogy, not a proof). Christ's own words carry the concept with no Latin needed: "he who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16), and "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). We handled two honest topics: celibacy is a discipline of the Latin Church, not a dogma (the Eastern Catholic Churches ordain married men, and the Catechism says so at CCC 1579 to 1580), embraced for the kingdom's sake in Jesus' and Paul's own categories; and the scandal of unworthy ministers, faced without excuses: sins that exploit the sacred office or the persons entrusted to it carry a gravity and scandal all their own; and yet a minister's sin does not invalidate the sacraments, because they never ran on his holiness: even if Judas baptizes, Christ baptizes. Where the Church's ordinary conditions were in place, your baptism is valid and the absolution that freed you was real.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Vianney

"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus." The Catechism itself quotes the holy Curé of Ars saying it (CCC 1589). Vianney was by every account a limited man; in persona Christi is why his confessional needed a sixteen-hour line. The office was never about the size of the man.

Quoted in CCC 1589

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Ordained against his will, St. Gregory withdrew for a time, then wrote in substance: the guiding of souls is the art of arts and the science of sciences, and the man who must stand between God and the people ought to tremble first. The saints took this office seriously enough to be terrified of it. (A summary of his Second Oration.)

Oration 2

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

The priest consecrates not by his own power but as the minister of Christ, in whose person he speaks; which is why the sacrament does not fail when the minister is unworthy, since the power at work was never the minister's own. (A summary of his teaching on the minister of the Eucharist.)

Summa Theologiae III, q. 82

Live It This Week

- At Mass, when the priest says "this is my body," silently pray: "Jesus, that is your my."
- Write and send a short, specific note of gratitude to a priest who has served you.
- If the scandal discussion touched a wound of yours, do one gentle thing about it this week: a trusted conversation, an honest prayer of anger and grief, or a conversation with a priest who has earned your trust.

Memory Verse

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 1:1 to 8 once. Last session, we go to heaven. Bring your Session 1 Take-Home if you still have it.

Catechism References

CCC 1548; CCC 1550; CCC 1579 to 1581; CCC 1584; CCC 1589.