

Session One Handout

What is ministry and priesthood?

Have you found it yet?

- Everyone is called to be a witness of God.
- Training might teach you to be better at witnessing but it's not primarily about training, acquiring skills and then doing things it's about YOU. The very You God has created and loves.

Discussion

Thinking about vocation and the Church. In the Book of Revelation it speaks of the angels of the churches. This angel was the particular ethos or message that characterised an individual local church. When you think about your own church what would you describe as its angel – what is the message of God it gives and what is the message it could give? As we start to think through the answers we are deepening our understanding of the vocation and ministry of our church and our own part in that work of God.

Exercise

Those in advertising and the media know very well the power of symbols. Look at some magazine or newspaper advertisements and see what the image is saying about the product. Then imagine some detail in the picture being changed. For instance if the image depicts young people, imagine if the picture replaces them with those who are older, or if the gender of everyone in the picture was depicted the other way around, or humans replaced by animals. Sometimes the imagined change can be subtle, or humorous and sometimes it can be disturbing. This simple exercise shows us that if we alter symbols then inevitably the meaning that they once carried is also altered.

Priesthood

- This is God acting on our behalf to fill the gap between Himself and us.
- What fills the gap is Christ the High Priest
- By our baptism into Christ we become part of His priestly activity. It's why all prayers finish with 'Through Christ our Lord' or something similar.
- To deepen our understanding and experience of priesthood God has revealed certain symbols (or picture or icons) that He represents through the ministerial priesthood
- Symbols can carry richer meanings than blunt explanations

The Symbols of Priesthood

- The Father and the Son.
- Sacrifice
- The Bride and Bridegroom

Discussion

Reflecting back on our previous discussion of symbols and how they work; if we were to disregard or significantly change the symbols what would that do to our understanding and experience of priesthood? Would it be a new priesthood bearing a different meaning?

The Twelve Apostles

- God sent His Son as the Image of the Father. Jesus said, 'Those who have seen me have seen the Father.' The Son calls twelve men to be Apostles. The Apostles are the living image of the Son, who in turn is the image of the Father. An interconnected chain of witnessing.
- Jesus actions are very deliberate in choosing twelve male Apostles from a band of disciples that included many women

Discussion

As we have seen the symbols are not a matter of play-acting. The meaning of the symbol is carried in the very essence and nature of those who bear them. It is not that the bishop or priest vaguely looks like the symbol but that their nature speaks of the symbol and makes it easier for us to see how Christ is acting through the image. Through many millennia of faith, from ancient Aaron to Christ and through the Apostles and to the modern day, the Church has understood that these symbols are to be enacted in the lives of some chosen men. It is the gift of spiritual paternity revealing God our Father. If the Church were going to reinterpret the symbols and move beyond the example of Christ, what would be a sufficient authority to do this so that it can be done with confidence? It would not be enough to say, 'the majority thinks so in our particular time' (remember, truth might be the lone voice in the wilderness) – and it would be very uncertain to claim a unique authority from the Holy Spirit.