

WHAT, THEN, IS A PRIEST?—

When our Lord separated Himself from us and in His Holy Ascension went up into heaven, He left us priests, whom He appointed in His place to be His representatives on earth and to show forth and illustrate in their persons the holiness of His teaching and the excellence of His virtues. He left holy men behind Him, and His intention was that these holy men were to transmit to us the same holiness which He placed in them. His going was like that of the sun in the heavens, which, sinking beneath the horizon in the evening time, communicates its light to the moon and the planets, which in its absence illuminate the earth by night and shine with a borrowed radiance.

Thus the Son of God, having ascended up on high, left in His Church apostles, bishops, and priests as so many luminaries to be the light of the world during His absence. They are His lieutenants and vicars, and therefore they should be His exact images, precisely reproducing in themselves the form of the Divine Original.

But this is not all. Priests should not only be in their persons living and visible copies of Jesus Christ; they should also reproduce Him in others. The priest, then, is a spiritual father who generates spiritual children to Jesus Christ. But the father cannot give to the child what he does not himself possess. In the same way, the priest will not be able to give to his spiritual children humility, charity, compassion, and meekness — the virtues communicated to him by Christ Himself, if he does not reflect these same virtues. The priest's life should be such that he illuminates as he has been illuminated.

What, then, is a priest? He is the minister of a better world, sent to withdraw man from the vanities of this present existence and to teach him by his work and example, according to the beautiful expression of Scripture. He must show man how to walk in the way that leads to God. Too many pulpit priests today tell men why they should be holy. They fail to tell men how to be holy. Too many traditional Roman Catholic Priests are guilty of this. Man must be told how to be holy, or he will not ever come to know how wonderful it really is to be a man of God. The priest should live by faith; he should live a supernatural life. He should avoid, as seriously as possible, the temptation to be an intellectual priest! Erudition is certainly not an essential part of the priesthood. Let us never fail to keep in mind that Satan is the leading intellectual! The further the priest advances in the spiritual life — his life of holiness — the more fully he realizes in himself his dignity as man, his privilege as a Christian, his character as a priest and a reflection of Jesus Christ, and the more faithfully will he labor for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.