

Are All Believers Priests?

The Catholic catechism teaches there are two divisions of the priesthood: the “common priesthood” (normal Catholics) and the “ministerial priesthood” (clergy). However, I have found that this distinction is not common knowledge, nor is it the actual, functional mindset of most Catholics. Instead, they tend to reserve that title, calling, status and privilege to their designated leaders.

In the Old Testament, the word “priest” is translated from the Hebrew *kohen*, which in essence means “one who draws near to God.” It also speaks of a person who is authorized by God to minister in sacred matters and who acts as a mediator between God and those who desire to approach Him. The priests of the Old Covenant were called to draw near to God in worshipful devotion, represent Him to the Israelite people and then represent the Israelite people to God in a mediatorial role.

An exclusive priesthood was God’s design for that era. God told Moses to anoint his brother, Aaron, as the high priest, and his sons as priests. That family line served as priests in the tabernacle of Moses, and later, in the temple of Solomon, until A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans and the Jews were taken captive. The Levites (one of the 12 tribes of Israel) also served in that prior age in a kind of subordinate priestly capacity, serving the Aaronic priesthood and fellow Israelites in religious matters. (See Ex. 30:30, Lev. 21:10, Num. 3:1-12, Deut. 18:1-8, Jer. 33:21.)

However, such an arrangement was a “a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of those things” (Heb. 10:1). In other words, that system was not God’s permanent plan; it was symbolic of something better He intended to do in the future. Evidently, it was something He desired from the start—for soon after their exit from Egypt, God gave the entire nation of Israel a conditional promise:

“‘Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation’” (Ex. 19:5-6a, NKJV, author’s emphasis).

Yes, God’s longing was for *all* His people to have access into His presence, to worship Him, serve Him, commune with Him and represent Him in this world. Although that did happen in a lesser sense during that former era, it would yet take the death, burial and Resurrection of the Messiah to make it a living reality on the highest level.

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The New Testament Era

This concept of an exclusive mediatorial priesthood was abolished in the New Testament era, a truth plainly revealed in Scripture. Since the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, every true, born-again believer is called to fill the role of a priest, verified by the following declaration from Peter’s epistle, presented to those who have experienced the truth of the gospel:

“Coming to Him as to a living stone who is rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house as a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5, MEV, see verse 9).

First, this passage describes all God’s people as a “spiritual house” being constructed out of “living stones.” True born-again believers out of all denominations make up this corporate “temple of the living God”—His worldwide dwelling place (2 Cor. 6:16, see Eph. 2:19-22).

Second, this passage describes all of God’s people as a “holy

priesthood”—a priesthood determined, not by natural birth, but by spiritual rebirth—a priesthood cleansed and made holy, not by the blood of animals, but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Third, this passage encourages New Covenant priests to offer up “spiritual sacrifices” to God. That includes sacrifices of righteousness, sacrifices of thanksgiving, sacrifices of joy and sacrifices of praise. (See Ps. 4:5, 27:6, 116:17; Heb. 13:15.) True believers are not only called to *offer* “spiritual sacrifices,” but they are also called to *become* sacrifices to God, as the following exhortation indicates:

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

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What an amazing shift took place after Jesus ascended into heaven! In the Old Testament era, Israelites came prayerfully to the temple, to the priests, for their assistance in offering sacrifices to God on His altar. In this New Testament era, for those who are born again, the ancient methods of approaching God have been lifted to a much higher spiritual reality:

- We are no longer required to go to the temple to offer worship; we are the temple.
- We are no longer required to go through the mediatorial service of priests to be reconciled to God; we are the priests.
- We are no longer required to bring animal sacrifices to God;

we trust in the supreme sacrifice, the crucified Savior, and in worshipful response, we become “living sacrifices,” “crucified with Christ” (, Gal. 2:20).

Long before this radical paradigm shift, God declared prophetically, “See, I will do a new thing” (Isa. 43:19a). This “new thing” is a wonderful thing. So, let us rejoice exceedingly that this calling is not only for time, but for eternity:

“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and *priests* to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5b-6, author’s emphasis).

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