

CONFORMED TO CHRIST

## ***A year for priests***

by Mary Sharon Moore

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In this Year for Priests, I pause to consider this word: Priest. For some time now this word has been hitched to the phrase, “shortage of,” and so the word takes on a tone of chronic urgency.

When I reflect on the word “priest,” my thoughts immediately go to that poignant passage in the reading for Ash Wednesday. In the Book of Joel, we hear the prophetic word: “Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep, / And say, ‘Spare, O Lord, your people’” (Joel 2:17). I picture the priest lying prone in spiritual anguish amidst God’s people, beseeching God for mercy and life.

This public prostration before God and the sacred assembly, a posture of humility and complete submission, occurs today in the ordination rite. Though filled with joy, the new priest’s posture of submission is his public practice of the sacrificial intercession he will be called upon to make throughout the course of his priestly ministry. Intercession before God on behalf of the world demands personal investment, personal involvement, getting your heart mixed up with the world’s anguish, the way Jesus did.

This “getting your heart mixed up with the world’s anguish” is the work not only of priests but of all of God’s people. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms, “The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and

Confirmation the faithful are ‘consecrated to be . . . a holy priesthood’” (CCC, 1546, citing *Lumen gentium* 10:1).

None of us lives for ourselves, St. Paul admonishes; if we live, we live for the Lord (see Romans 14:7). Our lives are not our own (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). Each of us has been permanently anointed to get our heart mixed up with the world’s anguish. The more we unhinge the door of our heart and let a confused and broken world enter in, the more authentic our prayer will become.

When you listen to the news, you encounter the subject of your priestly prayer. When you read the papers, you encounter the subject of your priestly prayer. When you drive around town, you encounter the subject of your priestly prayer. “The poor you will always have with you,” Jesus cryptically said (see John 12:8). Why? Because the poor, the broken, the lost and forsaken, the disenfranchised, the ones of no name and no account are drawn to the oil and balm of your anointing. It may be invisible to you, but not to those who seek What and Whom they cannot name.

French Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote in his essay “The Priest,” in his book *Writings in Time of War* (1968), “Since today, Lord, I your Priest have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I shall spread my hands over the whole universe and take its immensity as the matter of my sacrifice.” This prayer reshapes my understanding of my own priestly role within the body of Christ. In that one baptismal anointing in the Holy Spirit, each

of us, in our own vocational way, shares the common priestly work of intercession, in Christ, for the salvation of the world.

Addressing priests, Father Teilhard closes his essay with these powerful and sobering words: “You have the power—through your ordination—in a real way to consecrate into the flesh and blood of Christ the sufferings you see on all sides, and in which your

priestly character makes it your duty to share.”

Let us pray, for our priests, the courage and generosity of heart to offer sacrificial prayer for this aching and anguished universe. And for ourselves let us pray for a eucharistic imagination to see the world’s suffering as worthy matter, consecrated as truly a part of Jesus’ most perfect offering to his Father.

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