“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The Society of Mary and Social Justice – Part 3

I began our reflection about Catholic teaching on social justice by stressing the importance of the context in which it should be received. That context is baptism, where we are united with Christ, who gives us a share in his ministry as priest, prophet, and servant-king. For our purposes, I will only explain how the baptized share in Christ’s ministry as priest and how it relates to sanctifying the world, which is another way of saying social justice.

Through baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ.[i] This participation is called the “common priesthood of all the faithful.” For review, there is one priesthood, and that is of Jesus Christ. There are two ways in which the faithful participate in Christ’s priesthood: the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial (ordained) priesthood. In this meditation, I will focus on the priesthood of the faithful and sidestep explaining the difference between it and the ministerial priesthood.

Speaking of the latter, all of us are acutely aware of the shortage of ordained (ministerial) priests. On the other hand, there is no shortage of those who are called to exercise the priesthood of the faithful, which is proper to all the baptized. However, there is a shortage of baptized who understand and identify themselves this way. I fear that many baptized identify more easily with their political party and its agenda than with the Church and its mission entrusted to the laity, which is to sanctify the world.

As a quick review, all Christians are called to holiness or, as I would say, to become saints. What is holiness, and what does it look like? Well, holiness is participating or sharing in the divine life given to us when we are united to Christ in baptism. If we live out our baptism well, we will become more and more like Christ, thinking, judging, feeling, and acting like Christ in all things. Our goal is one day to be able to say with St. Paul, “It is I who no longer lives in me but Christ.” In short, all Christians are called to present or represent Christ to the world (evangelization) so that others may come to know him and share in the divine life that union with him offers for their own lives and the life of the world.

Holiness is not focused solely on our personal salvation but also on the salvation of the world. The two go hand in hand. The law of the spiritual life is that any gift from God is meant to be given away. The essence of the divine life is love which we receive in baptism. Love is not something we possess and keep to ourselves. The very nature of love is to be given away and reveals itself in our actions, which certainly includes acting justly.

As we grow holiness, we will look outward and love the world as God does. “God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son.” (John 3: 16) God continues to love the world by sending his Son but now through the baptized (Church). In baptism, Christ begins the process of conforming ourselves to him, who will propel us to love others, even our enemies, and conform the values of this world to those of the reign of God. The divine life of love will not allow us to remain indifferent to the injustice that reveals itself through the actions or inaction of others. That includes laws and policies of organizations, governments, businesses, etc. Rather, it will propel us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and be in solidarity with the weakest and most vulnerable, adding our voice to their cry for justice. That is what holiness looks like.

This transformation of ourselves into Christ and sanctifying the world will not occur quickly nor without suffering and sacrifice. The complete transformation of the world will happen with the second coming.

Until then, the Church and people of goodwill form a resistance movement, advancing here, losing ground there but forever pushing forward, never giving up because we know how this battle will end.

To love others, meaning to want what is good for them even when our efforts are spurned or when promoting justice will lead to our persecution, are the spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God because they are indicators of our growing transformation into Christ. That is what the celebrant prays for at Mass when he says, "That you (Lord) will see and love in us what you see and love in Christ." Those transformations or conversions are what we celebrate at Mass and one of the reasons why we refer to the Eucharist as a celebration.

The laity exercises the priesthood of the faithful when they unite themselves and their spiritual sacrifices with Christ on Calvary, made present in an unbloody way in the sacrifice of the Mass. We cannot love others as Christ does without suffering in this fallen, sinful world as Christ did. That is why Christ seeks to be in Holy Communion with us, to nurture and strengthen the Divine Life (Love) given to us in baptism so that we will become what we receive, the Body of Christ. Becoming like him means we will follow him to our personal Calvaries. Yet, apart from him, we can do nothing, which is why Jesus said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you." (Jn. 15:4)

The baptized can belong to a political party, espouse an ideology, and be patriotic. But there is only one Lord and one Gospel to which each of these must bend the knee. That is why I said earlier that a Catholic would never feel entirely at home in any political party. Our citizenship is in heaven, but while here on earth, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Then, we act to bring it about by being God's answer to that prayer.

In the following meditation, I will look at social justice within the context of the mission and spirituality of the Society of Mary and why the Marists believe this to be an essential component of a Marist education.

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[i] The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says clearly that all of God's faithful people share in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of their baptism: "Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church 'a kingdom, priests for his God and Father'" (CCC 1546, cf. Rev. 1:6, 5:9–10). Further, it says, "The whole Church is a priestly people."