



VATICAN - TOWARDS THE PRIESTHOOD, Mgr Massimo Camisasca: The Priest: a man of God at the service of others

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - A vocation to the priesthood is first of all God taking the initiative in our life. This means that more than anything else the priest is a 'man of God': a man chosen by God. However this statement can be misunderstood. To say that a man is chosen by God does not mean that he lives closed in God's Mystery. A man with "his head in the clouds", who has nothing to say to the world and the men and women of the world because - being part of another world - he is not interested in this world and has nothing relevant to communicate to it. Obviously this is not the significance of 'man of God'.

Instead the priest is a man who learns to see the world and people as God sees them. However this is a long process which takes time. Not by chance, to educate his disciples to see as God sees Jesus had to live with them for several years: this was not something which could be done in just one or two lessons. And even this living together was not sufficient. Without the Spirit of God who was to gradually tell them everything, this striving to become one with God's vision lived in the time of the preaching of the apostles would not have sufficed. Learning to see as God's sees is certainly the working of the Spirit in our life, which makes us slowly but surely familiar with the God's way of thinking.

But what is the slow and arduous path we must take? We must start by reading and meditating Scripture as it is read by the Church, Scripture presented to us in the Missal and the Breviary. Through Scripture we learn to understand what interests God in everything that happens. As a consequence we too learn to distinguish what brings peace, joy and communion in events, rather than division, laceration, negation, violence, sadness.

The second path consists in the Writings of the Saints. Here we see the itinerary they walked to acquire God's vision.

The third path is conversation with friends who help me on this path. This is the way to experience that I was chosen by God: that God loved me first. This is why He sent his Son for me. Without this personal experience of love, priestly life is impossible. The priesthood is precisely an experience of love received, of personal love, received from Christ which expands in experience of the Church as one's personal destiny. "This is my part, my chalice", the psalm says: the priest as a man of God experiences the life of the Church as his own personal destiny.

However the priest is also a man for others. In other words, a man of self-giving. It is better for a man who wants to keep something of himself for himself not to become a priest. What is priestly life if not sharing in the life of Jesus? And His life was self-giving. He gave himself without limit. His only limit was no limit. So we understand that the foundation of priestly life lies in the Sacraments which are the expression of Jesus' unlimited giving of self: and Jesus continues to give himself. For all these reasons the priest can be a man of God for others only if he draws continually from Jesus, that is from the sacraments, the strength and the measure for self giving. We know that Jesus' self giving becomes an exchange: He give us himself and takes on himself all our sins. The priestly life is the same, it consists in carrying the burdens of others. However this is only possible if we entrust ourselves to the arms of Jesus. (Agenzia Fides 10/11/2006; righe 41, parole 650)