

"In the beginning
was the Word,
and the Word was
with God, and the
Word was God."
—John 1:1

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“The Laity and Their Role in the Church”

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The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines [CBCP] has declared 2014 as the Year of the Laity (from December 4, 2013 to December 4, 2014).

Who are the laity? The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) of the Roman Catholic Church has defined the laity as the people who belong to the Church other than members of the clergy and the religious congregations. They are the lay people.

Lay people are incorporated into the body of Christ and into the Church. They are made sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly missions. This means that lay persons are consecrated; they are set apart for God. We often think that when someone is consecrated, he is a priest or a nun. It actually means he or she is being dedicated to God.

When we are baptized; we are being dedicated to God. We are being set apart. We are in fact being appointed by God; He wants us. The Lord is the one consecrating us. We cannot consecrate ourselves to God by ourselves. We might excuse ourselves by claiming that we are not deserving of God; but God will not agree with us. He says, *“I choose you, I love you, and I want you to be mine.”* So when we are baptized, we are being consecrated. It means we are one with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

According to the 1st Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, we were all baptized in the same Spirit and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we were baptized.

St. Paul explained what happens during baptism [Romans 6:1-11]. When we are baptized, we experience the death and burial of Christ so that we can have life and become one in the resurrection of Christ. In the same way through Christ's death because of our sins, we too die because of our sins. We now live in union with Christ through His resurrection. We share in the life of the Son of God.

St. John has a different image of Christ's death, burial and resurrection: rebirth. We read this in Christ's dialogue with Nicodemus. Christ said to Nicodemus, *“Unless a man is born again he will not enter the kingdom of God.”* [John 3:3]. The Lord also said, *“Amen, Amen, unless you are born of water and the Holy Spirit you shall not see the kingdom of God.”* [John 3:5]. Being born of water and the Holy Spirit is being born again or being born from above. Christ also mentioned that what is born of the flesh is flesh. Humans are capable of giving birth to humans only. But if we are to be born as children of God, we must be born of the Spirit.

According St. John in the 1st chapter of his Gospel: “Those who are born not of the flesh or of the will of man but of God are the ones who are born of God.” [John 1:13]. They are begotten and adopted by God. When the Lord adopts, He makes us His own. We are born from above. We are all born of God. That is why we were granted a new life and we can only have new life when we are joined to Christ. When we were baptized, the Lord made us one with Christ. When we were joined to Christ, we were also joined to those who belong to Christ. We were not only joined to God but we became part of His family. This is important in the life of a laity. There is no greater dignity than to be a son of God and to be a part of His family.

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” [1 John 3:1-2]

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” So we are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” [Galatians 4:4-7]

When we pray, the Lord wants us to be intimate with Him. He wants us to deal with Him as children deal with their fathers because the Lord loves us with a father’s love. To be children of God is our greatest dignity.

The principal message of the Gospel on Sunday, January 19, 2014 was “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” [Matthew 18:4]. *“See that you do not despise any of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.” [Matthew 18:10].*

“O Lord, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth! You have set your majesty above the heavens! When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place— What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?” [Psalm 8:2, 4-5].

We were wonderfully made by God. We shall be like Him for we will see Him as He is!

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