

OUR LAITY AT WORK AS ROYAL PRIESTS OF GOD

Seated at the right hand of God the Father, our risen and glorified Savior, Christ Jesus, is engaged in enlarging and protecting His Kingdom here on earth. Unto his disciples after His resurrection He gave the commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"- Marc. 16,15- with the promise, "and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"-Mt. 28,20; and when He was about to ascend He repeated His charge, declaring, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me...unto the uttermost part of the earth."- Acts 1,6.

"Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, without blemish."- Eph. 5, 25-27. To that end "He gave some, apostles; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith; and of the knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Eph. 4,11-13. Again through the apostle Peter he declared concerning His disciples, the believers, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." I Peter 2, 9-10.

There is no other way of building the Church. In other words, to witness "the Word of reconciliation," is the One duty of the Church of Christ.

It may not be unprofitable to repeat this with some emphasis in our day where the Church is in danger of dissipating its strength and vitality by fostering in the name of EVANGELISM all sorts of extraneous activities and strategical plans to bolster the upbuilding of the church organization. Thus, we hear it stated, "to function effectively, properly, successfully the church must be well organized; the better the organization, the better the functioning of the church." There is no quarrel with

good order and sane programs; on the contrary; yet it may surprise the sponsors of such aforementioned notions, to hear that the outward form which the church assumes on earth is quite INCIDENTAL; that nowhere in the New Test. Scriptures do we find an injunction concerning any particular organizational program of the church, or any specific outward method and form of building Christ's church.

We read that the first Christians came together daily with one accord in the temple; that they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine; that there was baptizing and the breaking of bread, prayer and fellowship; and that the church increased in number from day to day. Later on, as the work of the apostles took on greater proportions and the membership grew, the believers in their Christian liberty saw fit to set up an office of deacons or almoners; and from time to time, as conditions and circumstances necessitated it, other offices were created, and some, no longer necessary, were dropped. "For the gospel," as our sainted seminary professors used to state it to us students, "the gospel furnishes the forms which become necessary." Thus it is still in our day - the organization of our congregations, its groupings, its extraneous programs, may change form, "The gospel remains the same forever." These introductory remarks were made, because, as stated, we hear and read much these days of systems, high pressure activities, programs and methods of all kinds as being essential in gaining effective and successful kingdom work, of 'evangelizing the world', and, say they, 'in this we must get our laity interested'.

Of course, as we said, good order, definite programs with specific goals in mind, as conditions and circumstances warrant, as also the training of the laity for the furtherance of the church's real work, are in place today as they were in the first Christian church. However, they must never in any way take the place of 'the word of reconciliation', or to express it differently, alter the commission which Christ gave His Church, "teaching them all things, whatsoever I commanded you." Matth. 28, 20

In my particular assignment - "Our Laity at work as Royal Priests of God-" therefore, I shall not chiefly treat of particular programs, extraneous methods, and the like by which the laity is especially to be reclaimed for greater participation in the work of the church.

A so-called 'Evangelism Committee' has been officially appointed, and is hard at work to provide practical guidance for the intensive participation of the laity in the work of the church and synod.

My prayerful desire shall be to point out, first, that royal priesthood, true Christian evangelism, includes the whole congregation, both clergy and laity; and then some remarks on such essential work of the laity which underlies and generates the motivating power for wholehearted, faithful activity as royal priests in the upbuild of Christ's Church.

The two parts of the essay are - 1-Our laity as royal priests of God.

2-Our laity at work as royal priests of God.

To revitalize true and greater activity in our church life, it is essential that both, clergy and laity, ever rediscover and repossess to an ever greater degree the glorious revealed truth of the SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS, the priceless treasure purchased and won by Christ Jesus our Lord and given to His Church. This revealed truth, perverted and strangled by the Roman papacy was again restored, thank God, through God's instrument, Luther, by the Reformation. When Jesus, the Head of His Church, charged His followers, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel"-Mark 16,15. His commission included not only a certain number of His followers, perhaps only the twelve, but All true disciples of Jesus, and that unto the end of time. This He also stated in His parting words at the time of His ascension when He said to His disciples, "ye shall be witnesses unto Me...unto the uttermost part of the earth-" Acts 1,8. This includes Each and Every True Believer. The same truth is declared when the Holy Ghost through Peter states of the believers, "ye are a chosen generation, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD..." I Peter 2,9; and again when St. John by inspiration writes "Jesus Christ has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to whom be glory and dominion forever and ever." Rev. 1,6.

When, therefore, the church is called "an holy nation"; its members 'royal kings and priests', it includes every and all true believers. This is a universal priesthood.

Each and every believing person, irrespective of color, race or nationality; of station or calling in life; rich or poor, is a royal priest. So writes St. Paul Gal. 3,27-28 - "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

This priesthood is, of course, unlike that of the Levitical priesthood in the O.T. It is a spiritual priesthood and expresses our personal intimate relationship to Christ Jesus, our true High Priest, "Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the people; for this He did once, when He offered up Himself." - Heb. 7, 26-27.

This spiritual priesthood is the power of a new life received by grace through regeneration, as St. Paul writes to 2 Tim.1,9- "God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." In short, we, true believers, have by grace been dedicated, consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest, Who has washed us from our sins and made us kings and priests to the Most High God.

O the height and depth of this unsearchable, amazing grace and love of God in Christ Jesus! And, as far as this spiritual priesthood is concerned, to repeat, there is no difference between clergy and laity. I am stressing, EACH AND EVERYONE OF YOU, LAYMEN, is by grace such a royal priest, even as every pastor, teacher, missionary, professor. It is out of the number of spiritual priests and kings we call our clergy. Only spiritual priests may be called as public or representative servants of the spiritual priesthood(or ministry of the Word). By being called as such by their fellow royal priests they do not become a nature greater royal priests than the laity. To distinguish two kinds of spiritual priests, as the pope does, is unscriptural. Holy Scripture does not speak of a spiritual priesthood to which the laity belong, and of an ecclesiastical priesthood to which class the priests, bishops and t

like belong. Luther calls this 'lauter Irrtum und Blindheit': all error and blindness.

It is true, Christ gives to His Church royal priests with special gifts and training whom fellow believers, or royal priests, call as pastors, teachers, missionaries, professors and the like. These, in the name of the others, representatively, as servants, exercise or carry out the priestly functions.

Here is Rome's, the pope's, grievous, damnable error. He teaches that man becomes a priest through the anointing and consecration of the bishops; Luther calls this 'an article of blasphemy and abomination'; on another occasion he writes: "The pope and his priests, who arrogate unto themselves this claim are thieves and robbers, blasphemers of the Church of Christ for having robbed the name priests, and appropriated it unto themselves." To this day Rome deprives the laity from any active spiritual participation in the work, outside of the absolute obedience to the priest and the paying of the church dues.

The priesthood of Rome is a sort of professional religious order, mediating between God and the ordinary laity. Laymen are more or less relegated to an inactive, passive role as far as the spiritual priesthood is concerned.

How inexpressibly grateful should we laity be that the Lord our God has graciously restored through the reformation the priceless gospel truth of the universal priesthood of all believers!

"Every believer in Christ a royal priest" that was to Luther the fundamental working principle of the entire evangelical outlook to enable him to see the essence of the communion of saints in the fellowship of all of Christ's people, and not in a so-called priestly institution, the hierarchy, a monkhood, or the like. This led him to see or view the Christian pastorate not as a mediatorial order, but as a representative office through which the gospel, entrusted to all believers, comes into its rightly ordered exercise. It was therefore that he abolished the arrogated rights and functions by the papal power, and found the true saintliness in the discharge of Christian responsibility within the natural orders of life in which God in Christ has placed each individual Christian, each royal priest, in his respective calling. Of course, generally speaking, we all subscribe to this truth of the universal priest

hood of all believers. But do we translate it into action? What does it mean to you personally, 'I by grace am a royal priest of God?' As you see yourself in the perfect mirror of God's holy law, and must cry out with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" - Rom.7,24--when you must declare, "false and full of sin I am, I am all unrighteousness", and then by the power of the gospel see all your guilt removed, hear your Jesus say to you in His Word, "Fear not, I have redeemed thee; I have called you by your name, you are mine"- Is.43,1; "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness I have drawn thee"-Jer.31,3- ; Must not this, does not this, fill our soul with a peace that passeth understanding, fill us with royal riches and with a genuine fresh start in life? For this is what the Holy Spirit through the gospel does to every believer, every royal priest; and that means you. (every layman) To be a royal priest, as you and I by grace in Christ have been made, our Life's motto and motive is and must ever be: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"-Gal.2,20

Ah, but here is the rub. Not that God's grace in Christ or His promises have in the least failed or weakened. God forbid! But we have lost sight of our spiritual priesthood! The exercise of our stewardship shows it. Look at the church attendance at the interest of church work; and, in the concern to preserve God's Word in all truth and purity; look at the adult Bible classes, the eagerness to be Kingdom workers at home and abroad; and not to say anything about the unwillingness in cheerful and generous giving of our material blessings for the maintenance and spreading of the soul-saving gospel; blessings which all come from Him who made us royal priests. Someone described the situation like this; "The church life of the majority of our people is characterized by a formal and passive receptivity and nothing more, The individual church member is usually nothing more than an animated receiving instrument and seldom becomes a broadcaster. We have DONE AGAIN what the reformation UNDED. We have professionalized religion. Have turned witness bearing into class prerogative and pay some man a salary to do it for us, while we may come to church

and listen." (Dr. Paul Scherer).

What a transformation it would mean in our individual, and in our congregational lives if this doctrine, "WE ARE ALL ROYAL PRIESTS OF GOD" would prevail in all its original power. No more would people hold the utterly wrong idea, at least in practice, that once they have united with a congregation - got their name on the church record- they have done their duty, as long as they attend church now and then, deposit their envelope, and help pay for the man "hired" to keep the congregation running.

It was never God's purpose to turn over the administrative and organizational function of the church to the laity while the clergy were to monopolize the spiritual function. The functions of the royal priesthood are spiritual, and as said, pertain to every believing Christian. This certainly also means the laity. And the Holy Ghost through St. Paul declares: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to EVERY MAN to profit with"- I Cor. 12,7. (Philip:"Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may make the most of it- I Cor. 12,7.)

Conscious of and realizing the God-given truth that God by grace has made of me poor sinner a royal priest, my church attendance would not be an end in itself, but it would be a means for releasing the resources of the gospel into the daily person to person practical contacts on the busy highways of life. With every layman recognizing and appreciating its Christ-given spiritual priesthood; it wouldn't be a pastor's church, i.e. where the pastor is loaded down with odds and ends that smack often no little of "serving tables", nor would the false notion obtain that the pastor tend only to the spiritual matters and the laity to the material.

Hence the laity will participate in the spiritual work and program of the church and not only the pastor, for all are royal priests.

To quote Luther once again, who points to his when he writes,: "We firmly maintain there is no other word of God than the one ALL CHRISTIANS are told to preach; there is no other baptism than the one All Christians may administer; there is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper, than the one every Christian may celebrate; also

there is no other sin than the one every Christian may bind or loose; again, there is no other sacrifice than the body of every Christian, -Rom. 12 also, no one can or may, pray but only a Christian; no one should judge of the doctrine but the Christian. These, certainly are the priestly and kingly functions".(X. 1590,71.) In setting forth the difference of the priesthood of ALL Christians and the public ministry, Luther writes: "Though all of us are priests, we may and should not on that account all preach or teach or ~~govern~~. However, from the whole congregation must be selected or chosen to whom this office is to be committed. And whosoever holds this office is now, because of it, not a priest(like all the rest), but a servant or minister of all the others. Thus you must distinguish between the ministry or the office of service and the common priesthood of all baptized Christians. For this office is nothing else than the public service which is entrusted to one by the whole congregation, who are priests at the same time".(Rom. V, 1037 - Pieper III page 442).

So much for part One: the laity as royal priests of God.

OUR LAITY AT WORK AS ROYAL PRIESTS OF GOD,
 or, the primary, essential work which generates the motivating power and underlies
 all wholehearted and faithful activity of Royal Priests of God.

We all agree that the work of Christ's Church, our work as Royal Priests of God, is
 the most glorious work on earth which our Lord and Master has entrusted to His
 disciples; for it consists in winning immortal souls from Satan's kingdom for
 Christ's Kingdom; from eternal death for eternal salvation. It is the one purpose
 and reason, why the world still stands; why the final judgment has yet not arrived.
 What a privilege! What a responsibility! This is for EVERY Royal Priest, for every
 Christian layman.

How have we fared as such? How are we doing? While under God's gracious blessing
 our church body has made some advances at home and abroad in the Kingdom work; have
 "lengthened the cords" - Is. 54, 2, yet as we survey and a little more carefully
 scrutinize our work, as individual Royal Priests, as congregations, what in the face
 of the blessings showered upon us is the picture? What do we find, especially in
 view of the greatest blessing, the preservation in our midst of His undefiled Word
 and Sacrament? How faithfully have we availed ourselves of the opportunities He has
 given us as spiritual priests and co-laborers of His, living-witnesses of His grace
 and love in Christ; singing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of dark-
 ness into His marvelous light?

Alas, we must contritely bow our heads in shame, and confess that we have fallen far
 short of having zealously and faithfully been at work as Royal Priests, esp. in view
 of the opportunities and blessings given us by Him. The love which should mark all
 those "who are hid with Christ in God" Col. 3,3. i.e. who are Royal Priests, is luke
 warm; the spiritual battery is low, at times not working at all. There is a certain
 indifference, drowsiness, yea apathy, in our priesthood work. The syllabus before us
 with the various reports of all our districts, reveals this sufficiently-esp. the re-
 ports on missions at home and abroad, our educational institutions, Christian day
 schools, etc.; and if we would take the trouble of reading somewhat carefully the
 proceedings in our synodical reports only of the past ten years, we would get a
 still more dreary picture. Here we find again and again statements to this effect:

'promising mission fields could not be entered because no laborers for the field are available; no funds in the C.E.F.; the erection of a chapel is most urgent but no funds available'. Similar expressions regarding our educational institutions esp. D.M.L.C., where both in classrooms and dormitories cramped and crowded conditions obtain, so that it has become impossible to enroll more young men and women in whose hearts the Lord created the willingness to be trained as workers in His Kingdom. Why should such conditions prevail where God has . . . undeservedly blessed us with His Word and abundant material blessings! Our country in the past years has had the highest income in its history and the largest savings deposits the land has ever experienced; while the work of spreading the gospel goes begging!

Generally speaking, similar situations obtain in the individual congregations. Church attendance, attendance at Bible classes, Christian day schools, Sunday schools comparatively speaking, as also mission activities, are not what they should and could be. And what about the homes of our Royal Priests? How many are without a family altar? And the individual royal priests who make up the congregation, afflicted with the same "spiritual arthritis", for lack of a better or stronger term!

Whence this lack of appreciation, yea apathy in the work committed unto us by Him whose own we are, who has called us poor sinners by grace to His Kingdom; made us Royal Priests, gave us the means of grace and His unfailing promises?! Why this spirit of complacency when the world is in such a state of turmoil, blundering along in confusion, trembling on the very precipice of an awful eternity? The picture becomes still darker and more grave, when we take note of the God-given opportunities knocking at our door, at home and abroad, and, we hesitate to proceed in the very face of His gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"- Matth. 28,20; "yea, I will strengthen thee; I will help thee; yea, I will uphold with the right hand of My righteousness"-Is. 41,10.

It it out off place to apprise ourselves of the situation? to point out our spiritual drowsiness? to emphatically awaken ourselves to the painful fact, how the cancer of materialism and wordly mindedness is making itself so noticeably felt in our work as

as Royal Priests of God? Or will anyone say, "I am immune to all this?"

Just to mention one more example by which this spirit of indifference and lukewarmness in our God-given work as Royal Priests of God manifests itself. I am thinking of our Voters' meeting, where the voters, the Royal Priests, are to deliberate, to discuss, to study, and plan in the Kingdom work. How are these meetings attended! How difficult is it to rally 25 per cent., at very best 40 per cent, of the voters, the Royal Priests, for such gatherings! Yet God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light for this Kingdom work. And every layman is a Royal Priest, "is given this gift by the Spirit that he may make the most of it"- II Cor. 12,7.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me": this is, to repeat, the business of every believing Christian, therefore of every Christian layman. This is not a part-time work but demands the whole person, the whole life. The Holy Ghost declares by the prophet Amos (6,1): "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion." When men wonder why Jesus labored so zealously, He replied: "I must work the work of Him that sent Me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work" - John 9,4 and 17 - and Jesus told His followers, us, "As My Father has sent Me, even so send I You." John 20,21.

They accused Paul in his activity of being beside himself, but he answered:

"Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your sake. For the love of Christ constraineth us" - II Cor. 5, 13 f.

We who have received God's mercy ought never to faint, and certainly never to be an I.W.W. in the Kingdom work; nor should we feel sorry for ourselves. If we believe, as we do, that men without Christ will eternally perish, 'where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched', and on the other hand, that we are just as certain that the gospel of Christ, which we have, is the only power that regenerates the heart, converts men, makes Royal Priests of them, saves them from damnation, can we, as Royal Priests of God, sit by idly? we, 'whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high'?!

But we hear some say, "that's all well and good for the pastor, and such who have been called by the church as full-time laborers; but we surely don't expect laymen who work hard at their respective vocation to do pastoral work?" 'NO, they are not to do the pastor's work, but they are to do the work of Royal Priests. And the laity can do

their work faithfully as Royal Priests of God,—be it on the farm, in the factories, in the office, or wherever God may have placed them in this world. For whatever work is done in the fear of the Lord, motivated by the love of Christ, becomes worship service. By your activity and labor you are sounding "forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous Light." For by your living example of what Christianity is and means to you, you are pointing others to Jesus, their only hope and Savior.

St. Paul speaking of Royal Priests of God,—and he is here speaking of the laity,—calls them "living epistles of Christ, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the Living God, known and read of all men." II Cor. 3,3.f.—

The story is told of some Christians, who were trying to persuade a Jew to accept Christ Jesus; but the Jew replied: "Why do you boast of yourselves as Christians? Your conduct is not worthy of imitation. You drink to excess, you make light of the sins against the 6th commandment, take advantage of the other fellow in your business deals; you curse one another by the name of God and by the suffering of your Christ; and still you confess to be redeemed by such suffering. Why do you lead such lives? Who will believe that you are Christ's people?"

As Royal Priests we are to reflect the truth of the gospel, by our faith, in our lives by our speech and by our conduct—, whether we are merchants, farmers, lawyers, or whatever calling we may have.

What an inspiring example the Christian church is in its infancy for us. 'Even the scorners recognized that the Christians were different from other people; esp. did they notice the love they had for each other; and that in spite of opposition they clung so steadfastly to the Word, and in increased number. A Christian poet aptly expressed this in verse: "You laity are the only Bible the careless, unbelieving world will read; you are the sinners' gospel, you are the scoffers' creed; you are the Lord's last message, given in deed or word. What if the type is crooked, What if the point is blurred?" This does not, of course, set aside the activities and work of the laity in the home—congregation. Work for which Christ, the Head of the Church, gives each his talent, as St. Paul writes the Corinthian laity: "Each man is given his gift by the spirit that he may make the most of it." (Philip II Cor. 12, 7)

If the individual Christian and Christian congregations, who have received so abundantly of God's rich treasures, of spiritual, and material gifts, use them sparingly or niggardly in Kingdom work, they will eventually shrivel, even as Jesus states: "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you." Mark 4, 24.

It is God's own vital method of setting the power of the gospel into the common life of humanity through the priesthood of all believers. The only hope of bringing the gospel down into the current of every-day life is through the witness of God's Royal Priests; as they labor in shop, office, field, factory, etc. "Those who wish to know the fellowship of Jesus must display Him to the world; those who would enjoy His eternal life must live for Him as well as in Him!

Our weakness in the church today is that we so often stop with our work as Royal Priests at the church door, and hold the pastor to do all the 'witnessing'. How entirely foreign is this concept to the Bible! While the pastor is the divinely chosen leader of the flock, "the overseer - Acts 20,28 - and while our Lord will hold him accountable for a leadership of integrity and faithfulness, yet as a Royal Priest he has no greater right, duty or authority to bear witness to the gospel than the laity of the church. As shown above, it is the privilege and duty of every Royal Priest "to show forth the praises, by word and deed, of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." "YE SHALL BE WITNESSES OF ME," said our Lord and Master.

How can this objective of the laity as Royal Priests of God be ever better obtained? How can we become more and more effective in our work as Royal Priests of God? How can we show forth, or "demonstrate" the love and mercy of Him who "has made us kings and priests, having washed us from our sins through His blood?" How may we regain that first love, that ability to reflect the glory of Christ's love in us?

The first thing of such priestly exercise of every believer, every Royal Priest, is his private, personal faith-life. Only a person who worships His Lord and God in private can and will worship Him in public. The whole personal life of the Royal Priest is to be a constant act of worship, as constant as his breath. Such holy fire of praise and prayer is, of course, not kept alive by his own efforts no more than

it is wrought by him, or by his selfwill or by resolutions, but it is accomplished solely by the oil of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us - "Know ye not that ye are temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" I Cor. 3,16. "It is the Spirit who helpeth our infirmities"- Rom. 8,26. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us."

Here lies our source of praise; God's Spirit through and by the gospel kindles and sustains spiritual activity. Hence our daily prayer: "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". God cannot use us for great purposes in His Kingdom until we have discovered the secret source of spiritual power by prayer. "Prayer is the Christian's breath, the Christian's native," It is the key to God's vast storehouse of spiritual blessings. Few things show our faith and love as much as does prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much - Jas. 5, 16." Every Christian who wants to draw any blessings of God upon himself and others will find time, will take time, to commune with His Lord and God in prayer. Prayer will drive him into the Word, and the Word to prayer. Time for prayer, communing with our Lord and God, is not only time well spent, but brings God's promises closer to us. Luther used to say: "The busier I am the more time I need for prayer."

Why is it that we who believe everything God has said through His Word about prayer do not spend more time in this activity of our spiritual priesthood? We know His unfailing promises: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you." Luke 11, 6, and again: "If you being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give His Spirit to them that ask him". Luke 11,13. Is it probably here(lack of prayer) where one of the causes for our individual weakness, our apathy, in spiritual activity lies? If prayer is the assertion of our faith, why not then strive and seek to live closer to Him, our High Priest? How it would aid us, touched by the mercies of God, "to give Him our bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him; and "not let the world around us squeeze us into its own mould, but let God remould our minds from within, so that we may prove in practice that the plan of God for us is good, meets all His demands, and moves towards the goal of true maturity."(Rom. 12,1-2) according to Phil's translation).

A second important thing in this priestly exercise of every believer, (or the laity at work as priests of God) is the establishment of a home altar. In the Christian home every house-father is a priest, and every mother a priestess. There you are to perform the office of the ministry as the called pastor does in the congregation. The strength of the church lies in the strength of its home. If we are looking for a spiritual reconstruction, (a spiritual revitalization), in our churches, it must begin in the home. Civic magistrates talk much these days about the rehabilitation of the home, in fact it is one of their major issues, but they have only the law. That cannot change human beings. As Royal Priests you have the one and the only remedy, the living Word. For that reason a Christian home will set up and keep a home altar. When a home is cold spiritually, we must bring God's Word into it. God and His Spirit enter our home through His Word. The home that lets God speak to it; the home that is nourished daily by the Bread of Life; a home which invites the Lord to come with His grace, His truth, His love by the family altar, will be strong, a happy, a Christ-centered, active home. If we want our churches to be spiritually strong, the laity must exercise the Royal Priesthood in the home. It is a beautiful motto: "Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation". If this truth prevails, governs the home, you are doing the work of your spiritual Priesthood. In such a home there will also obtain good stewardship and there will be no need of lengthy explanations of many rules and regulations concerning Christian duties.

There is something insincere about people who go to church to worship God, and then when they go back home, they do not worship Him. Yet is not this probably one of the causes for the weaknesses and the spiritual dearth of the church today: the absence of regular family altars in the home? Here in part lies another reason for the complacency in the upbuild of Christ's Kingdom. While some make much ado about high pressure evangelizing and seek to have everybody get his or her name on the church roll, while the homes and the lives of such emotional converts remain spiritually cold,--such evangelism is of little value. Homes can only become spiritually warm, active, if the Word of God, "which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to

the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart".(Heb. 4,12) if that Word dwells there. "The strength of the church", to repeat, "lies in the strength of the home". How we should be concerned as Royal Priests of God of letting the family altar be a living, an active reality in our homes! And that the more so, as we are all aware of the demoralizing, soul-destroying influences of the day,-propagated no little by the daily papers, magazines, and no few radio and TV programs! Moreover, since in these latter days, as in the days of Noah, people are more godless, materialistic, idolatrous, self- and pleasure seeking, we must labor the more as spiritual priests and see that our homes are little sanctuaries in which God is worshipped and glorified. Thereby "we shall also show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light, and shall be a salt and a light in the world."

If the laity thus as Royal Priests of God, exercises its spiritual priesthood in the home, it cannot but necessarily follow that they will also as Royal Priests of God regularly worship with their fellow believers in the house of God. The Lord has so ordained it that believing children assemble for united worship. The public assembly of God's children is written in the N.T. order. The preaching of the Word and the celebration of Holy Communion imply assembled congregations. As private worship is the primary function of the individual Royal Priest; as home worship the primary duty of the priestly family, so public worship is the primary function of the Christian congregation. Christians who want to be true to God, true to themselves as Royal Priests, will not look at church services as a fine custom, when convenient or as something that may be passed by without grievous sin. The laity prove their Royal Priesthood by treasuring divine services and attending regularly, unless prevented for reasons acceptable to God. And all this not by compulsion, but because in the divine services they know and believe that Jesus, our High Priest, is present and meets with His people in His own appointed way through Word and Sacrament. Here is His Presence, His Grace, His Power, and Love. Here the Royal Priests offer united prayers, express the mightiest praise and bless His Name. Here is given each believer a foretaste of the worship in Heaven. It is, however, also a mighty testi-

mony to the world at large that we honor, worship, and praise Him, "Who bought us with His own blood, whose own we are." At the same time it is a call and invitation to the unchurched. Above all, it strengthens us in our common faith and Christian life. Equipped with new divine power through the Word and Sacrament, uplifted by the united prayers and praises of fellow Royal Priests, we again go our homeward way to bring forth the fruits of a believing child of God, "of a Royal Priesthood, a chosen generation, a holy nation."

This implies, of course, that we shall above all things ever guard the infallible truth of God's Holy Word; be ever ready to defend it at all costs; be diligently and earnestly concerned about the furtherance of the work of the home church, of the Synod; of co-operating with our fellow believers in the work of Missions at home and abroad, training of pastors and teachers; Christian education; and whatever is necessary work in the upbuild of Christ's Church, to the praise and glory of His Name and the winning of immortal souls.--

Such is the LAIITY AT WORK as Royal Priests of God, "whom God has not given the spirit of fear but of power and love and of a sound mind"-- II Tim. 1,7.

We close with the Apostle's exhortation recorded in (King James: Hebr. 12,12: Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

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