

**The United Body of the Faithful: A Theology of Lay Apostolates in the One Body**  
**Parish Liturgical Conference at St. Veronica's Parish, Chantilly, VA, February 15, 2014**  
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1 Corinthians 12:14-31

**Origen:** For what does it profit if I should say that Jesus has come in that flesh alone which he received from Mary and I should not show also that he has come in this flesh of mine? Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, Homily 3 (trans. Heine), p. 101.

**Romano Guardini:** The primary and exclusive aim of the liturgy is not the expression of the individual's reverence and worship for God. It is not even concerned with the awakening, formation, and sanctification of the individual soul as such. Nor does the onus of liturgical action and prayer rest with the individual. It does not even rest with the collective groups, composed of numerous individuals, who periodically achieve a limited and intermittent unity in their capacity as the congregation of a church. The liturgical entity consists rather of the united body of the faithful as such -- the Church-- a body which infinitely outnumbers the mere congregation. The liturgy is the Church's public and lawful act of worship, and it is performed and conducted by the officials whom the Church herself has designated for the post -- her priests. In the liturgy God is to be honored by the body of the faithful, and the latter is in its turn to derive sanctification from this act of worship. It is important that this objective nature of the liturgy should be fully understood. Here the Catholic conception of worship in common sharply differs from the Protestant, which is predominantly individualistic. The fact that the individual Catholic, by his absorption into the higher unity, finds liberty and discipline, originates in the twofold nature of man, who is both social and solitary. Romano Guardini, "The Prayer of the Liturgy," in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 20<sup>th</sup> ed. (trans. Lane ), p. 19.

**Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:** Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross", but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

**Pope John Paul II:** The Church's mission of salvation in the world is realized not only by the ministers in virtue of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful; indeed, because of their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.

The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their *foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation*, indeed, for a good many of them, *in the Sacrament of Matrimony*. When necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of Orders. The Code of Canon Law states: " When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of the law." However, *the exercise of such tasks does not make Pastors of the lay faithful*: in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head, and in his Eternal Priesthood. The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the

official deputation given by the Pastors, as well as from its concrete exercise under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority....

Following the liturgical renewal promoted by the Council, the lay faithful themselves have acquired a more lively awareness of the tasks that they fulfill in the liturgical assembly and its preparation, and have become more widely disposed to fulfill them: the liturgical celebration, in fact, is a sacred action not simply of the clergy, but of the entire assembly. It is, therefore, natural that the tasks not proper to the ordained ministers be fulfilled by the lay faithful. In this way there is a natural transition from an effective involvement of the lay faithful in the liturgical action to that of announcing the word of God and pastoral care. (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 23.)

**Pope Benedict XVI:** Co-responsibility requires a change in mentality, particularly with regard to the role of the laity in the Church, who should be considered not as "collaborators" with the clergy, but as persons truly "co-responsible" for the being and activity of the Church. It is important, therefore, that a mature and committed laity be united, who are able to make their own specific contribution to the Church's mission, in accordance with the ministries and tasks each one has in the life of the Church, and always in cordial communion with the bishops. In this regard, the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* describes the nature of the relationships between laity and Pastors with the adjective "familiar": "A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders...." (no. 37). Dear friends, it is important to deepen and to live out this spirit of profound communion in the Church, which characterized the early Christian community, as the book of the Acts of the Apostles attests: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (4:32). Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the International Catholic Action Forum, August 10, 2012.

**Pope Francis:** Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 102.

**Emphasis for this Conference:** To see how the laity's exercise of being Musicians, Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and Ushers in the Body of Christ offer them and the world an experience of Christ not only in the present act of the Mass itself, but for the evangelization of the world. We can consider this in three ways.

- 1) Acts of Christ in his one Body the Church (my eye seeing and I seeing): the priest acts *in persona Christi capitis*; all Christians act in Christ. In each, it is said that Christ is acting.
- 2) The various services done in Mass are to extend to the world, such as through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy related to these liturgical ministries: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, pray for the living and the dead, etc.
- 3) Sing/play for the world to come to Mass, read the Word for the world to come to Mass, minister Christ for the world to come to Mass, and welcome Christ in the stranger for the world to come to Mass.