

**Item #112 (Why the Priesthood Is for Men Only)**

The limitation of the diaconate, priesthood, episcopacy, and papacy to members of the masculine sex in the Roman Catholic Church is understandably a fraught question among many persons, even among Catholics themselves, today. The reason the question is understandably fraught today is the common supposition of the basic equality of men and women in questions of public office. The present writer is a firm believer in the equality of men and women in questions of public office unless there is specific evidence to the contrary. For him there is specific evidence to the contrary, apart from the evidence of the practice of the Roman Catholic Church. This note will consider one specific text of Sacred Scripture and its relation to the practice of the Church.

The following presentation is considered by this author as plausible and nothing more. It attempts to present arguments based on Scripture and is not considered by this author as replacing in any way the current reasoning of the Catholic Church that limits the offices connected with the priesthood to men.

A lengthy discussion is necessary for a complete presentation of the choice of the first twelve apostles who are chosen by Jesus after He passes a whole night of prayer to His Father on a mountain, but the accounts in Luke 6:12-16 and Acts 1:1-12 are sufficient for present purposes. In this formal selection of the twelve men who can be called the first priests/bishops of the Church which eventually will be termed "Catholic", that is, "universal", women are deliberately excluded, though they are taught to have an active role in life as followers of Christ (see Titus 2:3-5).

At this point it is important to recall the essential role of Abraham in the foundation of Christianity. After the failure of Adam and Eve to pass the test given them by God (Genesis 3), God chose Abraham to be the ancestor of all Christians through Christ (Genesis 17-24). In Genesis 22 God places Abraham to the test like the test He placed Adam and Eve to. But here there is no woman involved, even though Abraham, like Adam, was married. But Abraham passes the test. But a sacrifice is still called forth by God by the appearance of a ram tangled in the nearby underbrush.

In New Testament times Jesus is aware that the approbation of Abraham did not involve the sacrifice of any human, but He Himself, calling together the apostles whom He had appointed (see Luke 22:14), using the historic Passover as a model built into tradition, institutes the Eucharist as a liturgical prefiguration of His own death (see Luke 22:14-20). No woman is involved in the commission of the apostles to

officiate in the subsequent repetition of this ceremony that Jesus calls the New Covenant on which the Old becomes fulfilled in the New which He calls the basis of “the Kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16).

In Hebrews 5:1-10, the “text” alluded to at the beginning of this essay, Jesus is begging His Father for the right as the Father’s Son to sacrifice Himself, just as tradition affirmed that Isaac was eager to sacrifice himself to prove the generosity of Abraham, his father. In neither case is a woman mentioned. Every deacon, priest, bishop and pope shares in the Sonship of Jesus Christ with His Father both as Victim and Priest in the Eucharist, and no woman has ever shared in this role. **(Rev. James Swetnam, S.J., Holy Thursday, 2024)**