

“Royal Priesthood”

What is a Church? Part 9

1 Peter 2:4-5

Summary: The Church is a kingdom of priests. Priests draw near to God to offer sacrifices and they teach God’s Word – an honored and kingly role. Offering a sacrifice as a priest is a very serious matter, even more than the time of Nadab & Abihu. We offer praise, prayer, repentance, ministry of spiritual gifts, giving, generosity and good deeds in general, faith and love, and the souls of men and women. The Old Testament was a smaller, lesser illustration of us, not vice-versa. This defeats rationalizing sin because instead of asking “Is this (thing I want to do) OK?” you ask, “Can I offer this to God as worship?”

Review

We are studying from Scripture what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. We spent a couple weeks studying what it means to be the body of Christ. Then three more weeks studying what it means to be the bride of Christ. Then two weeks studying what it means to be the Temple (Sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit. And today we get to the fourth major metaphor Scripture gives for the Church – a royal priesthood.

A Royal Priesthood

Peter goes from the nursing baby analogy to the bricks in a building analogy, and he sticks with that analogy for only ½ of a verse before he drops it and moves on to another analogy.¹ In verse five we are stones being built into a spiritual house, and the purpose of the house is to serve as a Temple where the priests serve, and guess who the priests are – us!

⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God

So we see that here we are compared to priests. The purpose of the building of the house of God that we talked about last week is that we function as a priesthood, offering sacrifices & proclaiming His praises as His special people. This is why we don’t follow the Catholic Church and call our leaders priests. Every Christian is a priest. God has made us all a priesthood.

The function of a priest

A high calling of sacrificing, teaching and leading

¹ So we are not just a Sanctuary, we are also the priests that minister inside that Sanctuary. Those of us who are Bible teachers should take a lesson from God’s use of metaphors. Sometimes we latch on to a really good illustration, and it is tempting to let the metaphor govern the truth instead of the other way around. Illustrations and metaphors are good, but the split second that metaphor breaks down – just let it break down. Never force fit a truth into an illustration. And this is also an important thing to understand when interpreting the Bible. When you are interpreting the Bible realize that even biblical metaphors break down when pushed beyond their specific, intended purpose. We are like bricks, but we are not like bricks in every way – only in the ways the text points to. We are like a bride, but not in every way. Satan is like a serpent, but not in every way. In some ways false teaching is like yeast and in other ways the Kingdom of God is like yeast. Be careful never to apply a biblical analogy beyond how it is applied in the text itself.

In Exodus 19:6 God promised Israel that they would be a royal priesthood, and we are currently the fulfillment of that promise. So what does it mean to function as a priest? Later on in that same chapter God gave a summary of what a priest does.

Ex.19:22 Even the priests who come near the LORD must purify themselves

A priest is someone who comes near the Lord. They were the only people who were allowed to approach the presence of the Lord, so they were the only ones who could offer sacrifices.

One other aspect of the priesthood involved teaching the truth and leading people to God. The priests were the teachers and preachers of the Old Testament. The Prophets revealed God's Word, and the priests taught it to the people.

Lev.10:11 and teach the Israelites all the statutes that the LORD has given to them through Moses."

2 Chrn.17:8 The Levites ...⁹ taught throughout Judah, having the book of the LORD's instruction with them. They went throughout the towns of Judah and taught the people.²

In Mal.2 Phinehas is commended for being a good priest.

**Mal.2:6-8 True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. ...⁷
"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction-- because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.**

So the priests drew near to God to offer sacrifices in worship and taught the people God's Word.

The priesthood was a very high and very honored office. When Saul presumed to function as a priest in 1 Sam.13 God rejected him as king, the kingdom was ripped out of his hands and his line was cursed. King Uzziah was one of the very few godly kings in the divided kingdom. He reigned as king of Judah for 52 years! (That would be like if Eisenhower were still the president of the United States today.) And Scripture says that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. But after five decades of godliness and faithful service to God he made a mistake. He went into the Temple and offered incense to God. And immediately God struck him with leprosy, and he died under the judgment of God. Just because you are a king doesn't mean you can function as a priest. That privilege is reserved only for the select few whom God has appointed and set apart for that holy task.

And here the priesthood made even higher by the term "royal" in verse nine. In verse five he calls us a *holy* priesthood, and in verse nine he calls us a *royal* priesthood.

Rev.1:6 He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father

Rev.5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Rev.20:6 they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

We are king-priests. To be recognized as a minister of God and priest of Yahweh is a very exalted role.³

² See also Dt.17:8-11, 21:5, 24:8, Ez.7:10, Nh.8:2-8.

³ It is high and exalted and prestigious in the same way Christ Himself is high, exalted and prestigious in this age, and that is, in the

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe...

Offering sacrifices

And the thing that makes it such an honored position is the fact that we can offer God pleasing, acceptable sacrifices.

⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God

Not all the Old Testament sacrifices were for sin. Some of them were simply acts of worship. The atonement and payment for sin part is fulfilled in Jesus' work on the cross. But the worship part is carried out through us in our priestly ministry. If you are a Christian you are a priest and it is your job to offer acceptable, pleasing sacrifices of worship to God.

And God has identified certain acts in our day that He will accept as sacrifices of worship. Those things include prayer, praise, contrition, ministry of spiritual gifts, giving, works of love and faith, and the souls of men and women. I want to show you each of those in Scripture so you can see with your own eyes that God refers to each of those as pleasing sacrifices. However, before we look at those, I want to take a few minutes to try to impress upon you something of the gravity of what it means to be a priest of the Most High God and to offer Him sacrifices in His Sanctuary.

The Gravity of the Priesthood

If you are like me, your role as a priest of the Most High God is not the main thing you usually think about when you consider your identity. I confess to you that prior to this study I have thought little and seldom about my responsibility to offer God sacrifices as a priest. But the more I studied the Old Testament levitical priesthood, the more gripped I was with the importance of this. This really merits an entire sermon by itself, but let me give it to you in capsule form.

Take a few moments to read through Ex.28-30 and Lev.9-10. Those chapters go on and on and on about the special clothes and underclothes, and cleansing and rituals and procedures and processes - all describing exactly what was required for a priest to be a priest. If you read those chapters you'll get an idea of how seriously God took even the symbols of this ministry.

Nobody volunteered to be a priest. They were chosen by God. Aaron and his sons were the ones selected, and they went through the entire process with exact precision. Then they had to go through another elaborate cleansing rite, and then a sacrifice and a series of rituals to purify their ears and hands and feet. Then God called them to the Tabernacle and told them, "OK, now you are ready to begin your seven-day ordination process." For this they were required to remain at the entrance of the Tabernacle around the clock for an entire week. At the end of the process, if they were accepted God would demonstrate their readiness by sending fire out from His presence to consume the sacrifice that had been set out.

At the end of the seven days the fire came and the sacrifice was burned up. Now it was finally time for their first priestly service. God called the entire assembly of Israel to come to the Tabernacle to watch.

Imagine Aaron standing there popping the buttons off his shirt – so proud of his sons; chosen by God, prepared, now standing here in front of the entire nation. If you could see inside Aaron's mind as he looked at his sons standing there all decked out in the priestly garb, about to go in to

eyes of God, but not yet in the eyes of men. Verse 4 makes a point that Jesus was rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him. And in the same way, anyone who comes to Him and believes will also be honored greatly by God.

6 ...Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and valuable cornerstone, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame! 7 So the honor is for you who believe... 9 you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession

the very presence of God, no doubt he was thinking something like, *This is the happiest day of my life!*

Take a look at what happened next:

Lev.10:1-11 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his own firepan, put fire in it, placed incense on it, and presented unauthorized fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them to do. ² Then flames leaped from the LORD's presence and burned them to death before the LORD.

Imagine you are there. The stunned silence of everyone present feels like it should never be broken. Aaron's face is white as a sheet. He is standing there in shock, looking at the charred remains of his sons. You and all the Israelites around you are standing there like statues in disbelief. Even the little children are quiet, not moving a muscle. And the first one to break the silence is the voice of Moses, who turns and faces Aaron and says these words:

³ So Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when He said: 'By those who come near Me I will be regarded as holy; And before all the people I will be glorified.' And Aaron remained silent.

Aaron couldn't argue. What is he going to say? He knew very well that God's holiness was more important than any person's life and more important than all people's lives put together. God didn't even permit Aaron and his surviving sons to mourn at that time. They were told, "If you grieve now you will die too."

⁶ Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not let your hair hang loose and do not tear your garments, or else you will die, and the LORD will become angry with the whole community. However, your brothers, the whole house of Israel, may mourn over that tragedy when the LORD sent the fire. ⁷ You must not go outside the entrance to the tent of meeting or you will die, for the LORD's anointing oil is on you."

That oil was part of the preparation for the ministry of a priest. When you are prepared and dressed and functioning as a priest, nothing is more important than what you are doing – not even a death in the family.

When God said "among those who approach Me I will be regarded as holy," who is that talking about? Who can approach God? Only a priest. No one else. Among the priests, who approach the presence of God in worship, God *will be* regarded as holy. Functioning as a priest is a series matter.

Now, does God deal with us that way in our time? If you make a mistake next Sunday morning are the rest of the people going to walk out smelling like smoke because they were standing too close to you when the fire hit? No. That is not the norm. People enter into the Sanctuary as priests and take God lightly every Sunday without ever being consumed with fire. Things are different now. Hebrews 12:18ff says we have not approached a mountain burning with fire so that it terrified even Moses. Instead we have come to a great joyful assembly. We have come to Christ, who absorbed all the wrath and danger of God's holiness for us.

However, just because the Lord Jesus Christ shields us from the terrifying threat of God's awesome holiness, does that make God any less holy? Now that we are protected from that in Christ does that mean it is now *less* important for us to regard God as holy than it was for the sons of Aaron? No! Just the opposite. In that passage in Hebrews 12 where it says we have not come to a burning mountain but to a joyful assembly, the conclusion is in verse 25. Since we have come to a joyful assembly instead of a terrifying, fiery mountain, therefore verse 25.

Heb.12:25 If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

He makes the same point in chapter two.

Heb.2:2-3 For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding, and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, ³ how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

It is not less important for us; it is more important! There is not less at stake now, when it comes to taking God's holiness lightly as a priest – there is more at stake. The consequence for us is not less severe. It is more severe. God does not emphasize His holiness less in the New Testament than in the Old – He emphasizes it more. The people witnessed God killing two priests back then; but we have witnessed God killing His own Son to demonstrate His holiness!

Let me take you back one more time to that moment when God killed Nadab and Abihu. You are there. You are looking with your own eyes at the trembling body of Aaron, trying to keep his knees from buckling under him as he was commanded not to mourn. You are still seeing spots from the bright flash of the fire that came out from God's presence, and you can still smell the horrific odor of burnt human flesh.

You don't know what to say; you don't know what to think, and then suddenly Moses turns to you and says, "God has just appointed you to take over their job now that they are dead. It is your turn to come and offer a sacrifice in God's presence as a priest." Do you think you would take it seriously? Do you think you would be careful? Do you think you would give serious thought to exactly what you did and how you did it as you were offering the sacrifice? That is exactly the position you are in right now. I think the only reason I do not physically, literally tremble when I approach God on Sunday morning is because of weak, little faith.

Now, remember that He is our Abba, Father. Romans 8:15 says that I can call Him "daddy" because of the Spirit of adoption. I love it that I am in His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He loves and whom He fully accepts and with whom He is deeply and thoroughly pleased. I love it that His righteousness is credited to my account, so that God is actually pleased with me to the same degree He is pleased with Jesus Christ. I love it that my many, horrible sins against Him are covered and atoned for by Christ's blood, that I might enjoy unbroken fellowship with Him and full forgiveness. I love it that even though I sin regularly I can come boldly into His presence without fear of rejection or rebuke. I love it that because of Christ I have come to a joyful assembly instead of a terrifying mountain.

But Oh, how important it is that we do not use all that to develop an over familiarity with God so that we fail to regard Him as holy when we approach Him. If all the ancient symbols of purity and holiness for the priests – all the white clothes and washings and cleansing rituals - if those *symbols* that pointed to our day were so important then, how important must the *reality* be now?

Approaching God as a priest is a very, very serious matter. Try to keep all that in mind as we think about each one of these. The first one is praise.

Praise

1 Pe.2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood ... so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Heb.13:15 Therefore, through Him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name.

If we are going to fulfill our function as priests, this church must be a place where genuine praise is rising up to God. This is why we sing every Sunday.

Genuine praise is praise that comes from joy in God. When you are so delighted in God that it causes something to come out of your mouth – that something is called praise. So for us to be a church it is not enough for us to just sing worship songs. For us to fulfill our priestly function those songs have to be intentionally offered as praise offerings. There has to be joy in our hearts, or it is not praise. And the songs have to be offered for the purpose of pleasing God, or it is not a sacrifice.

Prayer

Rev.5:8 Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

If we are going to function as a church and fulfill our priestly function, we had better be filling up those heavenly bowls when we meet together on Sunday morning. In the last church I pastored we had our corporate prayer time on Sunday nights because there wasn't time for it on Sunday mornings. On Sunday mornings all the time was used up with the worship service and Sunday school. But nowhere in the Bible does it say that Sunday school is an essential element of what it means to function as a church. Prayer, however, is. It is one of our sacrifices we offer as priests.

That is another reason why I strongly urge you to stay for the second hour. If you're not interested in corporate prayer ask yourself this: If God is so eager to hear the prayers of the saints, why am I not? If the prayers of the saints are so precious to God, why aren't they precious to me? And before you start praying, take a moment and get excited about the fact that you are about to offer God an acceptable, pleasing sacrifice that He loves.

Repentance

Ps.51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

David said that in a time when the sacrificial system was still in place. Even in Old Testament times these spiritual sacrifices of worship were more important than the physical pictures. The offerings of the heart have always been what matters to God.

When we fall into sin, we should be broken. He uses the word broken twice and then the word "contrite," which literally means "crushed." We are to be broken... broken, and crushed over our sin. When we enter the Holy Place as priests bringing our incense to God, we don't want to do what Nadab & Abihu did and offer unauthorized fire. We want to be careful to offer only what has been authorized. And one thing that has been authorized is penitence and humility before God and brokenness over our sin. God accepts that as a pleasing offering of worship if we offer it as worship.

Ministry of spiritual gifts

Ro.12:1 Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.

Then he goes on to talk about the humble ministry of our gifts humility. When you serve in a

ministry in the church, no matter what it is, make sure to present that to God as a sacrifice of worship.

I really do think all of these need to be conscious acts of worship. I used to think that as long as my initial motive for a practice in my life was worship, then whenever I did that thing it was automatically worship whether I was consciously thinking about worship or not. So if I signed up to help in the nursery and my motive for signing up was to worship God through that ministry, then I thought each time I served in the nursery it was automatically worship. But I am not so sure that is correct. That is kind of like the man whose wife says, “You haven’t told me you loved me in 20 years” and the man says, “I told you I loved you the day we got married – if anything changes I will let you know.”

I don’t think you can put worship on autopilot. Your intimacy with God will not survive on autopilot any longer than your intimacy with your wife will survive on autopilot. Try to develop a routine of reminding yourself to do what you do here as an offering to God. Don’t just do it. Consciously offer it as a sacrifice of worship. I am wondering if I should start a routine of parking the car on Sunday morning, and before piling out, taking a moment to pray and remind ourselves that everything we are about to do must be intentionally offered to God as a sacrifice of worship.

If we are going to function as a church and fulfill our priesthood, we have to be offering sacrifices (that is what priests do).

Giving

Php.4:18 I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided-- a fragrant offering, a welcome sacrifice, pleasing to God.

This passage is referring specifically to missionary support, but the principle applies to giving in general. Giving is such an important part of what it means to function as a church – I wish we had time to go into detail about what Scripture says. But I’ve already done that once – so I’ll refer you to that. It is a six part series on giving, and it is available for free on TreasuringGod.com

For now I’ll just say this: giving is a key component of worship. We are to give on a weekly basis, we are to do it when we come together the first day of the week, the act of giving must be motivated by joy, and the amount you give is to be a percentage of your income. We don’t have the time to get into the question of whether the tithe is still a requirement in New Testament times, but Scripture is very clear that your giving is to be *some* percentage of your income. Determine your giving as a percentage, not an amount. Don’t say, “I will give one hundred dollars per week” or “a thousand dollars per week” or “twenty dollars per week.” Instead say “I will give ten percent” or twenty percent or one percent or whatever percentage you are delighted to give to God. God tells us to give in proportion to our income – so we need to figure it in terms of a percentage not an amount that is a pleasing sacrifice to God.

And it must be done as an expression of our joy, and as an *intentional* act of worship. This is an area where I have to admit I have really been guilty of the autopilot thing. I made it a conscious act of worship on the day when I decided what percentage I would give in my budget, but I have to admit I have not given a lot of thought to making the weekly act of giving an act of worship. That is bad. Giving is an integral part of what it means to function as a church.

In fact, as I was studying this this week I was even thinking maybe we should put the offering into the worship service as a part of our formal worship. When we just put the offering box at the back and people drop their money in on their way out that gives a false impression. It gives the impression that the only thing that matters is *that* you give and *how much* you give. But what matters much more than either of those is *how* you give. God doesn’t need money. So when we give, but not as an act of worship, what are we accomplishing?

I want everything we do in the worship service to reflect the meaning of that action. So I have

moved the offering box to the front.

Right after the benediction we will come forward together as a church and offer our sacrifices of money together as a church. That strikes me as a little more priestly than just sitting there and having someone put a plate in front of you.

We only have one box up here, so you may have to wait in line, but how great is that? What a great way to honor Him – to be so eager to give to Him that you will *wait in line* to do it.

So when you come up after the benediction to give your offering, be very careful how you give. Imagine you are one of Aaron's sons standing in front of the Tabernacle with all your priestly garb, and you are approaching the Sanctuary. Be very careful how you give. Be careful with regard to what is in your heart when you put that money in the box.

So giving as a church is a sacrifice that we offer as priests. And so is any other form of giving or sharing in your own personal generosity – along with every other good deed.

Generosity and good deeds in general

Heb.13:16 Don't neglect to do good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices

Again, if you do it with the conscious motive of offering worship to God, then any good deed - leaving a generous tip, smiling at a cashier, taking out the trash at home, working a job to provide for your family, doing a load of laundry - anything that you do that you ought to do, if you offer it as an act of worship, God is pleased with it and receives it as a sweet-smelling sacrifice.

Offer your work to God as a sacrifice. When you are doing paperwork, or answering some emails, or making some phone calls, or preparing a proposal, or cleaning your house, or going to class at school - or whatever it is you do for your work (especially the parts that you are tempted to do a poor job on or grumble about) remind yourself that you are offering that work to God as a sacrifice. And remember God's requirements for a sacrifice.

Lev.22:22 Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire.

Mal.1:10-14 I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "But you profane it by saying ... 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it [referring to the privilege of ministry, which is described here as a feast] contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. 14 ... For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

God will not accept offerings that are given with the attitude that says, "What a burden," and that sniffs contemptuously at the privilege of serving Him, as though your ministry were a feast of bad food. God will not accept offerings given with that attitude because He is a great and mighty King and His name *will* be honored among the nations by means of pure offerings. When we offer God service with a "what a burden" attitude that is like putting an animal on the altar that is crippled and diseased and full of warts and festering, running sores.

So every good work you do is an offering. And if you wonder what constitutes a good work,

it is anything that arises out of faith and love.

Faith and love

Php.2:17 But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Eph.5:1-2 Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. ² And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

The Philippians' *faith* was a pleasing sacrifice, and Jesus' *love* was a pleasing sacrifice that we are to imitate. Whenever you love and whenever you believe – offer the resulting actions to God as sacrifices of worship. Sometimes people think their secular job has no real spiritual meaning. If there is something else you could be doing that would have a greater impact on the kingdom, then do it. But if there isn't, and if you are working that job because you believe it is God's will and you are doing it as an act of love for God and faith in Him, then offer that work to Him as worship.

The souls of men and women

Ro.15:15-16 I have written to you more boldly on some points because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of God's gospel. My purpose is that the Gentiles might become an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

When you engage in whatever ministry God has called you to, you should offer the souls of those to whom you are ministering to God as a sacrifice of worship. The reason you are doing ministry is ultimately for their souls, right? So if you work with the youth group, in your car, on the way to the youth meeting, you are praying, "God, I am about to offer You a sacrifice of worship. When I'm in this car again in a couple hours heading home from the meeting I want to have offered you those student's souls. Enable me and work through me by Your Spirit so that what I offer you will be pleasing to You – more pleasing than their souls are to You right now." If you work the nursery you can offer up to God the cared-for souls of those little kids as well as the spiritually nourished souls of those parents who could sit through the service without distraction. Those things are all sacrifices in the sense that they are things we can offer to God in worship that are pleasing to Him.

And remember, the two basic functions of a priest were to offer sacrifices and to teach God's Word. Every ministry you do should have as its ultimate goal to help get the Word of God into the hearts of the people so that people will turn from sin to God. When God is commending Phinehas in Malachi⁴ for being such a great priest, He said,

Mal.2:5 ...he feared me and stood in awe of my name. ⁶ True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

That is striking to me because it is stated not in terms of effort but in terms of success. It does not just say he rebuked many for their sin, or that he instructed many or tried to persuade many or prayed for many. It says he actually turned many from sin. Can God say that about you? Are there a lot of unbelievers whom you have persuaded to turn from their sin to Jesus Christ? Are

⁴ The words are spoken of Levi, but refer specifically to Phinehas, who was descended to Levi. (Nm.25:10-13)

there a lot of Christians whom you have confronted with their sin and succeeded in turning them from that sin?

That is accomplished by becoming involved enough in people's lives so that I am aware of their sin and am in a position of influence to get them to turn, and then skillfully applying the truth of the Word of God to their lives. Priests are teachers of God's Word. And if you're thinking, "I am not really competent to instruct people from Scripture," think again. Think about

Romans 15:14 ...you yourselves are ... competent to instruct one another.

You can do it because God has made you a priest.

The Real Thing

Be careful not to think about the illustration of priesthood in a backwards direction. Don't think that our offering all these sacrifices is an illustration of what the Old Testament priests offered in the Holy Place. Don't think that when you offer the sacrifice of giving or ministry, that that is almost like offering a real sacrifice on the real altar. That is backward. That massive altar in the court of the priests, and that huge, awesome building called the Sanctuary, and that whole procedure with the priesthood and the cleaning and the ornate robes and smoke and fire and all the rest - all that was the illustration. When they went into that room full of smoke and offered their incense to God after having heard His audible voice and having seen fire come out from His presence - that was the illustration that was almost like the real thing. But the real thing is what Jesus Christ, our High Priest, is doing through us.

Defeats rationalizing

This study has had a pronounced impact on my life the past few weeks. For some reason I have not really taken my role as a priest very seriously in the past. It was an analogy that I had not really thought through much, and so it did not mean much to me. But thinking about it these past few weeks has made a significant change in my life. Thinking about everything I do as a sacrifice being offered to God, and having those words ring in my mind: "Among those who draw near to me I will be regarded as holy" - spoken over the charred remains of two incinerated priests; that has had quite an impact on me.

For one thing, it really destroys rationalization. You know what I mean my rationalization? That is when you find yourself wanting to do something that is a little bit questionable, and you're trying to convince yourself that it is really okay. Your conscience tells you not to do something, and you are arguing with your conscience saying things like, "Technically it is not really wrong for me to do this, because it is not really as evil as it seems at first glance..." and you talk yourself into thinking it is okay. I have found that having an awareness of my priestly role really shuts down rationalization in a hurry. Because as soon as my flesh tries to say, "It is really OK for me to do this," my conscience just says, "Even if it is okay, is it an acceptable sacrifice of worship that you can offer to God? Do you really want to carry *that* into the Holy Place and offer it to the Almighty? Can you honestly look at what you are doing or what you are saying or what you are feeling or what you are thinking right now, and offer that to God as a pleasing sacrifice to Him?"

Asking that question changes your perspective in a hurry. Because when you think about the gravity of entering God's presence as a priest, and you find yourself saying to God as you approach: "God, this festering, decomposing pig carcass I'm offering You isn't really as unclean as You think. Trust me, it is really technically not that bad..."

But on the other hand, when what you are doing at that moment really is a good thing, and

you really are offering to God what you should be offering at that moment, the amazing, astonishing, earth-shattering reality is that you are actually offering to God something that really, truly is pleasing to Him! What an unspeakable privilege!

Let's take delight in that privilege. Every moment let us offer Him our thoughts, motives, actions, affections, inclinations, words, all that you do with your family, all that you do with your computer, all that you do with your hands, all that you do with you mind – and lay it before Him as an offering of worship. Let's not forget our high calling as a holy priesthood of the Most High God.