The Ministry Of Intercession

By Andrew Murray

"An holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:5).

"Ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:6).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me." These are the words of Jesus in Isaiah. As the fruit of His work, all redeemed ones are priests, fellow-partakers with Him of His anointing with the Spirit as high priest. "Like the precious ointment upon the beard of Aaron, that went down to the skirts of his garments." As every son of Aaron, so every member of Jesus' body has a right to the priesthood. But not every one exercises it; many are still entirely ignorant of it. It is the highest privilege of a child of God, the mark of greatest nearness and likeness to Him "who ever liveth to pray." Do you doubt if this really be so? Think of what constitutes priesthood.

There is, first, the work of the priesthood. This has two sides, one Godward, the other manward. "Every priest is ordained for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1), or, as it is said by Moses (Deut. 10:8; see also 21:5, 33:10, Mal. 2:6), "The Lord separated the tribe of Levi to stand before the Lord to minister unto Him and to bless His name." On the one hand, the priest had the power to draw nigh to God, to dwell with Him in His house, and to present before Him the blood of the sacrifice or the burning incense. This work he did not do, however, on his own behalf, but for the sake of the people whose representative he was. This is the other side of his work. He received from the people their sacrifices, presented them before God, and then came out to bless in His name, to give the assurance of His favor, and to teach them His law.

A priest is thus a man who does not at all live for himself. He lives with God and for God. His work as God's servant is to care for His house, His honor, and His worship, to make known to men His love and His will. He lives with men and for men (Heb. 5:2). His work is to find out their sin and need and to bring it before God, to offer sacrifice and incense in their name, to obtain forgiveness and blessing for them, and then to come out and bless them in His Name. This is the high calling of every believer. "Such honor have all His saints." They have been redeemed with the one purpose to be in the midst of the perishing millions around them God's priests, who in conformity to Jesus, the great high priest, are to be the ministers and stewards of the grace of God to all around them.

Then there is the walk of the priesthood, in harmony with its work. As God is holy, so the priest was to be especially holy. This means not only separated from everything unclean, but holy unto God, being set apart and given up to God for His disposal. The separation from the world and setting apart unto God was indicated in many ways.

It was seen in the clothing. The holy garments, made after God's own order, marked the

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priests as His (Ex. 28). It was seen in the command as to their special purity and freedom from all contact with death and defilement (Lev.21:1). Much that was allowed to an ordinary Israelite was forbidden to them. It was seen in the injunction that the priest must have no bodily defect or blemish; bodily perfection was to be the type of wholeness and holiness in God's service. And it was seen in the arrangement by which the priestly tribes were to have no inheritance with the other tribes. God was to be their inheritance. Their life was to be one of faith. Set apart unto God, they were to live on Him as well as for Him.

All this is the emblem of what the character of the New Testament priest is to be. Our priestly power with God depends on our personal life and walk. We must be one of them of whose walk on earth Jesus says, "They have not defiled their garments."

In the surrender of what may appear lawful to others in our separation from the world, we must prove that our consecration to be holy to the Lord is wholehearted and entire. The bodily perfection of the priest must have its counterpart in our too being "without spot or blemish," "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," "perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Lev. 21:17-21, Eph.5:27; 2 Tim. 2:7; James 1:4.) And above all, we consent to give up all inheritance on earth, to forsake all, and like Christ to have only God as our portion. To possess as not possessing and hold all for God alone, it is this that marks the true priest, the man who only lives for God and his fellow men.

Now comes the way to the priesthood. God had chosen all Aaron's sons to be priests. Each of them was a priest by birth. Yet he could not enter upon his work without a special act of ordinance, his consecration. Every child of God is priest in right of his birth, his blood relationship to the great high priest Jesus, but this is not enough. He will exercise his power only as he accepts and realizes his consecration.

With Aaron and his sons it took place thus (Ex. 29). After being washed and clothed, they were anointed with the holy oil. Sacrifices were offered, and the right ear, the right hand, and the right foot were touched with the blood. Then they and their garments were once again sprinkled with the blood and the oil together. So it is when the child of God enters more fully into what *the blood* and *the Spirit,* of which he already is partaker, are to him, that the power of the holy priesthood will work in him. The blood will take away all sense of unworthiness, the Spirit, all sense of unfitness.

Let us notice what there was new in the application of the blood to the priest. If he had ever as a penitent brought a sacrifice for his sin, seeking forgiveness, the blood was sprinkled on the altar but not on his person. Now, however, for priestly consecration, there was to be closer contact with the blood. Ear, hand, and foot were by a special act brought under its power, and the whole being taken possession of and sanctified for God.

Even so, when the believer who has been content to think chiefly of the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat as what he needs for pardon, is led to seek full priestly access to God, he feels the need of a fuller and more abiding experience of the power of the blood, as really sprinkling and cleansing the heart from an evil conscience, so that he has "no more conscience of sin" (Heb. 10:2). It is as he gets to enjoy this that the consciousness is awakened of this wonderful right of most intimate access to God and of the full assurance that his intercessions are

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acceptable.

As the blood gives the right, the Spirit gives the power and fits for believing intercession. He breathes into us the priestly spirit, burning love for God's honor and the saving of souls. He makes us so completely united with Jesus that prayer in His name is a reality. He strengthens us to believing, importunate prayer. The more the Christian is truly filled with the Spirit of Christ, the more spontaneous will be his giving himself up to the life of priestly intercession. Beloved fellow Christians, God needs, greatly needs, priests who can draw near to Him, who live in His presence, and by their intercession draw down the blessings of His grace on others. And the world needs, greatly needs, priests who will bear the burden of the perishing ones and intercede on their behalf.

Are you willing to offer yourself for this holy work? You know the surrender it demands, nothing less than the Christlike giving up of all that the saving purposes of God's love may be accomplished among men. O be no longer of those who are content if they have salvation and just do work enough to keep themselves warm and lively. O let nothing keep you back from giving yourselves to be wholly and only priests, nothing else, nothing less than the priests of the most high God.

The thought of unworthiness, of unfitness, need not keep you back. In the blood, the objective power of the perfect redemption works in you. In the Spirit, its full subjective personal experience as a divine life is secured. The blood provides an infinite worthiness to make your prayers most acceptable. The Spirit provides a divine fitness, teaching you to pray just according to the will of God. Every priest knew that when he presented a sacrifice according to the law of the sanctuary, it was accepted. Under the covering of the blood and Spirit you have the assurance that all the wonderful promises of prayer in the name of Jesus will be fulfilled in you.

Abiding in union with the great high priest, "you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." You will have the power to pray the effectual prayer of the righteous man that availeth much. You will not only join in the general prayer of the Church for the world, but be able in your own sphere to take up your special work in prayer, as priests, to transact it with God, to receive and know the answer, and so to bless in His name. Come, brother, come and be a priest, only priest, all priest. Seek now to walk before the Lord in the full consciousness that you have been set apart for the holy ministry of intercession. This is the true blessedness of conformity to the image of God's Son.

O Thou my blessed high priest, accept the consecration in which my soul now would respond to Thy message.

I believe in the holy priesthood of Thy saints, and that I too am a priest, with power to appear before the Father, and in the prayer that avails much bring down blessing on the perishing around me.

I believe in the power of Thy precious blood to cleanse from all sin, to give me perfect confidence toward God, and to bring me near in the full assurance of faith that my intercession will be heard.

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I believe in the anointing of the Spirit, coming down daily from Thee, my great high priest, to sanctify me, to fill me with the consciousness of my priestly calling and with love of souls, to teach me what is according to God's will and how to pray the prayer of faith.

I believe that, as Thou my Lord Jesus are Thyself in all things my life, so Thou, too, art the surety for my prayer life and wilt Thyself draw me up into the fellowship of Thy wondrous work of intercession.

In this faith, I yield myself this day to my God as one of His anointed priests to stand before His face, to intercede on behalf of sinners, and to come out and bless in His name.

Holy Lord Jesus! Accept and seal my consecration. Yea, Lord, do Thou lay Thy hands on me, and Thyself consecrate me to this Thy holy work. And let me walk among men with the consciousness and the character of a priest of the most high God.

Unto Him that loved us, washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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