

Christ and His Anointed Ones as Priest, Prophet and King

By Rick McKinney, Mother of God Community Teaching Series, 2024

Scriptural quotes and references are to the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition

The word “Christ” comes from the Greek word “Christos” which in Hebrew is “Messiah” and denotes someone who has been anointed for an office often by the pouring of oil (as in the Holy Spirit) upon their heads. There were generally three anointed offices in Sacred Scripture: priest, prophet, and king. A priest is one who offers sacrifice and makes intercession for the people. A prophet is one who hears and proclaims God’s message in word or deed to the people. And a king is one who has authority as servant leader over God’s people. Jesus Christ is “the” anointed one, and He is anointed to serve God’s people as the High Priest, as the Prophet sent from God, and as the King over all creation. However, all those who are “in Christ Jesus” are also anointed to serve in, through and with Christ in ways that are priestly, prophetic, and kingly (CCC 436).

In Sacred Scripture it is written, “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, who has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment” (2 Cor. 1:21-22); “But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge” (1 Jn. 2:20); and, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pt. 2:9). See also Ex. 19:6 and Rev. 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6 uniting God’s kingdom with God’s priestly people.

That said, the understanding of the “threefold” mission of all the faithful in Christ was generally not articulated until Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which states “The faithful who, as incorporated into Christ through baptism, integrated into the People of God and made participants, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ, exercise the mission in the Church and in the world” (*Lumen Gentium*, 31, Nov. 21, 1964).

And it was St. John Paul II who singularly developed a further understanding of this threefold vocation of the faithful laity in Christ with his apostolic exhortation, *Christi Fidelis Laici*, stating among other things that, “the participation of the lay faithful in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King finds its source in the anointing of Baptism, its further development in Confirmation and its realization and dynamic sustenance in the Holy Eucharist” (*Christi Fidelis Laici*, Sec. 14, para 9, Dec. 30, 1988; see also St. John Paul II’s encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, sec. 18-21, March 4, 1979).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reflects this understanding by stating, “Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established

as priest, prophet, and king. The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flows from them” (CCC 783; see also CCC 784-786, 871-873, 901-913, and 1241).

Jesus is the anointed one and all four gospels relate how He was anointed at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon like a dove and the voice of the Father identified him as His beloved Son in whom He delights (Mt. 3:16-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Lk. 3:21-22, Jn. 1:32). Matthew’s Gospel reads, “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

What happened objectively and subjectively to Jesus in His anointing at the Jordan River, is meant by God to happen to we his brothers and sisters both objectively in our anointing at our baptism and confirmation (or chrismation) using holy chrism oil and subjectively through our experiences of conversion and immersion in the Holy Spirit, for as all four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles testify that Jesus is the one who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11, Mk. 1:8, Lk. 3:16, Jn. 1:33, Ac. 1:5, 2:38, 11:16). As St. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life 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 2:19-20). We, who are “in Christ” are incorporated in his life, in his crucifixion, in his death, in his resurrection, in his Spirit, in his enthronement, and in his anointed ministry as priest, prophet and king.

In the Mother of God Community, we have teachings that particularly emphasize the Blood of Christ, the Cross of Christ, and the Name of Jesus Christ. These three teachings correspond, I believe, to Christ, the great High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15) whose intercession and blood atones for our sins; to Christ, the Prophet foretold by Moses (Dt. 18:15, Ac. 3:22), who is the Word of God, proclaims God’s Word, and is prophetically crucified (Ac. 3:18) so our old natures could indeed be crucified; and to Christ, the King of Kings (1 Tim. 6:15, Rev. 17:14), who has the authority to heal the sick, deliver those oppressed, mend the broken-hearted, and free those imprisoned by lies from the enemy.

As members of Christ’s body, we participate in Christ’s threefold mission. As royal priests we praise, worship, intercede and sacrificially give ourselves to our families, our brothers and sisters and our neighbors. As anointed prophets we ponder and proclaim God’s word to our ourselves and to our neighbors through the inspiration of the Spirit. And as anointed kings we take authority in Christ over our unruly selves and lead ourselves, our families and others to order our gifts and charisms to the building up of His kingdom.

Priests in Sacred Scripture: A Brief Overview by Rick McKinney, MOGC, 2024

Before there were anointed institutional priests there were patriarchal men acting as priests for their families or clans by making sacrifices and intercessions. In Sacred Scripture, after the flood, we read how Noah made burnt offerings on an altar he had built. We note how Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:22-32) and how he offered Isaac in sacrifice (Gen. 22), and we read about the sacrificial offerings by Jacob (Gen. 31:54, 35:14, 46:1) and others. This patriarchal order of the priesthood is similarly represented in the unusual story of Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who is also a priest of God Most High, and who brings out bread and wine and blesses Abraham who gave him a tithe or tenth of all the spoils he had taken after routing the kings who had taken captive his nephew, Lot, as well as the other inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14:18-20). Scripture also speaks of pagan priests of Baal and other false gods (2 Kgs 23:4-20).

It was Moses, under God's direction, who established the Levitical priesthood, and anointed his brother, Aaron as the first priest, as well as Aaron's sons. For it is written, "You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water... You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put tunics on them, and you shall gird them, Aaron and his sons, with sashes and tie headdresses on them, and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual ordinance. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons" (Ex. 29:4-9).

The Hebrew priests (Hebrew *kohen*, Greek *hiereus*, and Latin *sacerdos*) from the tribe of Levi, faithfully performed their duties first in the tent of the Tabernacle and later in the Temple at Jerusalem. Their duties included the offering of thanks, praise, prayers, and sacrifices, presiding at the designated Jewish holy days, teaching of the law to the people, and serving as examples of holy living (2 Ch. 23:6, 30:27 31:2, Eze. 22:26).

The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 70 A.D. as Jesus prophesied, saying, "the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God" (Lk. 19:43-44). When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed the Levitical priesthood in the line of Aaron ceased to function, but the priesthood in the line of Melchizedek, now restored by Christ, our great high priest, continues to this day in the ministerial priesthood of the Church and in the priesthood of all believers which were prefigured by the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek (CCC 1544).

Jesus, the Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), is the one who renewed the order of priesthood in the line of Melchizedek through his own passion and sacrificial death and who, like Melchizedek, brought out bread and wine at His last supper and so established a continuing sacrifice through a priesthood begun through His apostles with the words, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me," and "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Lk. 22:19-20, CCC 1333). The sacrificial Passover lamb and the rites of the Old Covenant are retired and transformed into the sacrificial body and blood of the Lamb of God in the New Covenant.

In David's Messianic psalm, it is written, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4), and in the Letter to the Hebrews it is stated that Melchizedek, "His name, in the first place, means 'king of righteousness'; next, he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace'. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever" (Heb. 7:2-3). The letter notes that Jesus is the high priest in the line of Melchizedek and supersedes the Levitical priesthood in the line of Aaron. Jesus himself quotes this psalm to proclaim that the Messiah is more than the son of David (Lk. 20: 41-44; see also Heb. 7; 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-16, 5:1-10, and 6:19-20).

There is in the Church or ecclesial community (Greek *ekklesia*, Latin *ecclesia*, and German *kirche*) of the New Covenant a hierarchy of the faithful which includes the ministerial and ordained order of priests (Greek *presbyteros*, Latin *presbyter*, and German *priester*; see Ac. 14:23, 15, 1 Tim. 5:17 and CCC 1551-52). This priesthood shares in a hierarchy of ordained church offices with those of bishops (Greek *episkopos*, Latin *episcopus*, and German *bischof*, see 1 Tim. 3 and CCC 874-96) and deacons (Greek *diakonos*; see 1 Tim. 3, CCC 1569-71). However, along their side is the priesthood of all believers in Christ or the common priesthood, who are a royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation (1 Pt. 2:5, 2:9, Rev.1:6, 5:10, CCC 897-903) and who also offer praise, thanks, and intercession (1 Tim. 2:1), as well as the offering of their bodies as living sacrifices in spiritual worship (Rm. 12:1) as members of the laity or consecrated life (Mt. 19:12, 1 Cor. 7:32-35; CCC 871-873).

In summary there are several kinds of priesthoods noted in Sacred Scripture and the Catechism including pagan, patriarchal, Melchizedek, Levitical, ministerial, and the priesthood of all believers (the common priesthood), "who by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself onto God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives (CCC 901-903).

Prophets in Sacred Scripture: A Brief Overview by Rick McKinney, MOGC, 2024

A prophet (Hebrew *nabiy*, Greek *prophetes*, and Latin *propheta*) is one who is anointed to hear God's voice and proclaim it in word or deed to designated persons or peoples. Priests and kings are somewhat institutional figures and are often anointed or crowned in official ceremonies, but a prophet's calling and what he says or does is to be, as much as possible, by direct inspiration from God and thus prophets are more often anointed by the oil of God's Spirit rather than with liquid oil upon their heads. In the only scriptural reference to anointing of a prophet it is more by impartation. God tells the prophet Elijah to anoint two future kings and to anoint Elisha as his prophetic successor (1 Kgs 19:16), but although he calls Elisha into discipleship (1 Kgs 19:19-21) it is actually Elisha who asks for a double portion (or anointing) of Elijah's spirit, which is granted to him after he witnesses Elijah ascend to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2).

In the only mention of the word prophet in the Book of Genesis, Abraham is referred to as a prophet by God himself in a prophetic dream and warning to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who had taken Abraham's beautiful wife, Sarah (and his half-sister), into his harem because Abraham had said that she was his sister but did not mention she was also his wife (Gen. 20). The word prophet is also included only once in the Book of Exodus after Moses had insisted to God that He choose someone else as a deliverer because he said he was not a good speaker. Thus, God designates his brother Aaron as a prophet (Ex. 7:1), and says to Moses, "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him" (Ex. 4:15-16). But the Lord does speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend (Ex. 33:11) and Moses in turn speaks to God's people, promulgating all the many decrees, statutes and ordinances of the Mosaic law (Dt. 4:44-45). The prophetic stature of Moses is such that God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses from among God's own people and that they would heed his voice (Dt. 18:15-19). In the gospels neither John the Baptist nor Jesus lay claim to being this prophet like Moses (Jn. 1:21, Mt. 16:13-17), but Jesus is proclaimed to be this prophet by St. Peter in his preaching after a paralyzed man is healed at the Temple gate called Beautiful (Ac. 3:19-23) and the Church has regarded Jesus as the promised prophet ever since.

During the wilderness sojourn prophets were encouraged by Moses, who said, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them" (Num. 11:29). However, false prophets who prophesied in favor of worshiping other gods were to be executed (Dt. 13:1-5), and those who presumed to speak in God's name but whose prophecies did not come true, were to be ignored (Dt. 18:20-22).

Typically, in the time of the judges, the ability to hear from the LORD (Yahweh) prophetically appeared to manifest itself only after the people strayed from following the LORD and they were then oppressed by a neighboring king which induced them to cry out to the LORD, who would then raise up a deliver who became their judge and this person was usually someone whom the spirit of the LORD came upon (Jud. 3:10, 6:34, 14:19) and could hear the voice of God. Among these judges were Othniel, Ehud, the prophetess Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel who began hearing the voice of the God as a boy, when at that time the word of the LORD was rare, but who became known throughout Israel a trustworthy prophet (1 Sam. 3:1-21). The spirit of prophecy even came upon Saul, who right after Samuel anoints him as king falls into a prophetic frenzy with a band of prophets (1 Sam. 10:1-12).

During the time of the kings of Judah and Israel there were often companies of prophets (2 Kgs 2:3,5,7) as well as prophets who appeared to be attached to king's court such as Nathan in King David's time (2 Sam. 7:1-4), and Isaiah in King Hezekiah's time (2 Kgs 20:1-7, 14). However, most of the prophets were not welcomed at the court of kings or in their temples and this was especially so in Israel as they often prophesied judgment and defeat at the hands of their enemies due to the worship of false gods and disobedience to the LORD, yet pagan prophets and false prophets often spoke in positive terms (1 Kgs 18, 21:17-24, 2 Ch. 18:1-27, Jer. 28). The lack of welcome for the harsh messages of the prophets is also seen in the writings of the prophets, especially Jeremiah. However, just like the psalms, the writings of the prophets during the reign of kings also had messages of consolation, as Jeremiah proclaims, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again, I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel (Jer. 31:3-4). The post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, were less harsh and exhorted the people to rebuild and to live holy lives, but except in apocalyptic literature the gift of prophecy appeared to be suspended for a time (see 1 Mac. 9:27), and John the Baptist came to be regarded as the last of the prophets under the Old Covenant (Lk. 7:24-30).

In the early church prophets of the New Covenant appeared to have a special standing right after apostles (1 Cor. 12:28-29, Eph. 2:20), and St. Paul recommended that among the spiritual gifts, prophecy should be especially pursued because it is easily understood and because those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation and may also unveil the secrets of a person's heart (1 Cor. 14:1-3, 25). Still, prophecy was to be weighed and conducted in an orderly and peaceful manner (1 Cor. 14:30-33) and, also abide in the traditions and teachings of Christ (2 Thes. 2:15, 1 Jn. 1:9). The gift of prophecy is being renewed in the church today by ordinary people who simply ask God if He has a word for someone and who participate in Christ's prophetic office in their witnessing and teaching (1 Pt. 3:15, CCC 904-907).

Kings in Sacred Scripture: A Brief Overview by Rick McKinney, MOGC, 2024

The word king (Hebrew *melekl*, Aramaic *melek*, Greek *basileus*, Latin *rex*, and German *konig*) generally means a ruler and one who reigns and has authority over a kingdom or territory. Political kings have been around a long time and chapter 14 of the Book of Genesis relays how a confederation of four specific city kings defeated and took captive another confederation of five specific city kings including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah where Abram's nephew Lot resided, and how Abram (later renamed as Abraham) and his 318 servants pursued and rescued Lot and those kings. There are also the stories about Joseph and Moses, in which the Pharaoh is known as the king of Egypt (Gen. 41:46, Ex. 6). As a matter of fact, during the time of Moses, Joshua, and the judges, most of the surrounding cities, nations, and territories all had kings, but not Israel.

Israel, you see, was meant to be ruled by the LORD (Yahweh) as their king. And when the people of Israel, after much oppression by the nations around them, insist that Samuel, the last judge, anoint a king to rule over them and lead them in battle, the LORD tells Samuel, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1 Kgs. 8:7). Samuel gives in to the people and eventually, under God's direction, anoints Saul with oil as their king (1 Sam. 10:1), but there remained a question on whether King Saul, chosen because of the people's desire, or any king, would or could follow the LORD according to God's own heart.

After numerous failures by King Saul to follow the LORD's direction whole heartedly God rejects Saul as king and seeks another man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:13-14, 15:11). Samuel is eventually directed to anoint David, a mere youth, as king, as it is related, "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David" (1 Sam. 16:11). David only succeeds Saul after many years of service to Saul and flight from Saul's wrath. In time, after Saul and his son, Jonathan, die in battle, David is anointed king of his own tribe of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4). Then, after seven years, he is anointed king of all Israel, conquers Jerusalem for his capital, and reigns for 33 more years (2 Sam. 5:1-9).

In David, God finally finds a king after His own heart and when David sins and strays from God's heart, he fervently repents (2 Sam. 11, 12, and 24). It is David's desire to build a house for the LORD, but the LORD tells him through the prophet Nathan that it is the LORD who will build David a house, with a line of succession among his descendants, saying, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:11). The line of Davidic kings does indeed last for some 400 years, but the forever promise is seen as messianic which does indeed last forever.

God's kingship of service and man's kingship differ on how they exercise authority. Jesus tells his disciples, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves" (Lk. 22:23-24). When Jesus was an infant, King Herod, known for his brutality, feared, "the child who had been born to be king of the Jews," and tried to destroy him (Mt. 2:1-16). Kings of this world fear any threat to their authority, but Jesus has a different kingship. When Pilate, the Roman procurator, asks Jesus if he is a king, Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world (Jn. 18:36), yet all four gospels note that Pilate had an inscription placed on the cross stating, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The kingdom of heaven, not of this world, is Christ's and our heavenly Father's kingdom of love and truth which has come, is come, and will come on earth as it is in heaven (Mt. 4:17, 6:9-10, 8:11, Jn. 18:37, 20:17).

Jesus, the Son of God, has kingly authority (Dn. 7:13-14), and yet he is the one who serves even to the point of death, for, "the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn. 5:19), Jesus was under authority and thus could command with authority (Lk. 7:7-8). He preached the kingdom of God coming alive by healing the sick, cleansing lepers, preaching repentance, casting out demons and giving his disciples the authority to do the same (Mt. 10:1). Jesus was recognized by the people as one who taught with authority and demonstrated it (Mk.1:22-26). After Jesus is resurrected, he empowers his disciples with his authority, saying to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:18-19). All people in Christ, lay included, are called to place Christ as Lord of their lives and participate in Christ's kingly office (1 Pt. 3:15, 1 Tim. 6:11-16; CCC 908-913).

Finally, in a summary insight, it is noteworthy that it was King David who when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem, not only danced before it, but also "sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD" (2 Sam 6:17), which is normally the duty of priests. Thus, the priestly and kingly roles were once again united as it was in Melchizedek, the priest and king of Salem, which some authorities believe became Jerusalem. In addition, David, who wrote many messianic psalms, is called a prophet by St. Peter himself in his first preaching opportunity on the Day of Pentecost when he quotes David saying, "you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay" (Ac. 2:27). Peter notes that David is dead and buried, "but he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne" (Ac. 2:30). Peter states that this is Jesus whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead and made him both Lord and Messiah (Ac. 2:32,36). As it was with King David, so it is with Jesus, God's anointed one (Rev. 12:10) and Son of David, who fulfills all three messianic roles of priest, prophet and king.