

The Shepherd's Voice Series

The Shepherd's Voice Series brings you the current teaching of Bishops and Cardinals on vital topics facing the Catholic Church today.

Catholics in the Public Square

Most Reverend Thomas J. Olmsted

How would you define a lay person?

A lay person is any member of the faithful who has not received Holy Orders and does not belong to a religious state approved by the Church. Through Baptism, a lay person is incorporated into Christ and becomes integrated into the People of God. A lay person has an important role in the life and mission of the Church. (*Lumen Gentium* , 31)

When Pope John Paul II wrote his major work on the life and mission of the laity he titled it *Christifideles Laici* , Christ's faithful laity. With this title he made it clear that faithful love of Christ is the key to bearing fruit in the Kingdom of God. This is true for everyone in the Church, not only the laity. Jesus says (Jn 15:5), " *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*"

• What is the difference between the laity and the clergy in the Catholic Church?

The clergy receive a special charism of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. As such, deacons, priests and bishops " *realize a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ that is different, not simply in degree but in essence, from the participation given to the lay faithful through Baptism and Confirmation.* " (*Christifideles Laici* , 22)

Lay persons, meanwhile, are primarily concerned with temporal matters and as such have a sort of "secular character." The laity may also be involved in matters connected with pastoral ministry, but only in matters that do not require the grace of Holy Orders.

• What is the role of the laity in the Catholic Church?

The role of the laity is in a special way to " *seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God .*" (*Lumen Gentium* , 31) As such, lay men and women are in a unique position to bring their faith into all areas of society.

It should be remembered that as the laity engage in temporal affairs, in their own way, they participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of the Church by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation.

• How do Catholic lay persons fulfill their call to holiness?

Every Catholic receives from God a call to holiness that is rooted in Baptism. In order to fulfill this call, lay men and women are required to " *follow and imitate Jesus Christ in embracing the Beatitudes; in listening and meditating on the Word of God; in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church; in personal prayer; in family or in community; in the hunger and thirst for justice; in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially in the least, the poor and the suffering .*" (*Christifideles Laici* , 16)

- **What are the main responsibilities of Catholics to themselves?**

Catholics have the responsibility of accepting Christ's invitation, " *Come, follow me.*" They need to surrender in love as He leads them along the paths of conversion, communion and solidarity (Cf. *Ecclesia in America*). They also need to properly form themselves in the Church's teaching, to participate actively in her sacramental life, and to live their faith in God accordingly. This responsibility exists for Catholics in all states of life.

Accordingly, Catholics are to be " *ever mindful of what it means to be members of the Church of Jesus Christ, participants in her mystery of communion and in her dynamism in mission and the apostolate .*" (*Christifideles Laici* , 64)

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