

Fifth Sunday of Easter - Lectionary: 52

Reading 1 - Acts 6:1-7

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19 - R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading 2 - 1 Peter 2:4-9

Beloved: Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in Scripture: Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame. Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall. They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny.

You are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Gospel - John 14:1-12

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father."

Fifth Sunday of Easter: The Theology of Priesthood and Temple

Summary

The liturgical readings and theological reflections for the Fifth Sunday of Easter delineate a unified vision of God’s plan to restore humanity’s original vocation as a priestly people. This restoration is achieved through Jesus Christ, who fulfills the ancient types of both Priest and Temple. The transition from the Old Covenant to the New is marked by a shift from physical structures and hereditary lineages to a spiritual house built of "living stones"—the baptized faithful.

Critical takeaways include:

- **Christ as the Fulfillment:** Jesus is both the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and the true Temple where humanity encounters the Father.
- **The Royal Priesthood:** Through Baptism, all believers participate in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal mission, offering "spiritual sacrifices" through their daily lives and the Eucharist.
- **Ordered Charity:** As seen in the early Church (Acts 6), true worship must be balanced with organized service to the vulnerable, establishing a pattern for both apostolic and diaconal ministry.
- **The Church as Living Temple:** The Church is not merely an invisible concept but a visible communion where the Holy Spirit dwells, requiring personal holiness and communal unity.

God restores humanity's priestly vocation through Christ. This restoration is made tangible in the Church's sacramental life, where the faithful are built into a spiritual house to offer worship that manifests as a life of holiness, charity, and witness.

Priesthood and Temple: Our New Identity in Christ

The Journey of Priesthood

From Adam to the High Priest

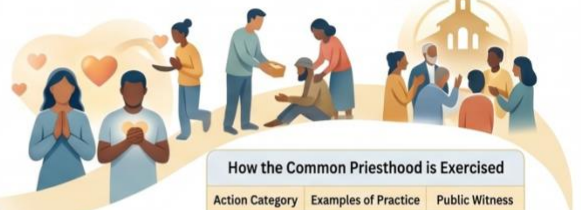


Priesthood evolved from Adam in Eden through the Levitical tribe to fulfillment in Jesus.



Christ's Unique Mediation
Jesus is the eternal High Priest whose once-for-all sacrifice replaces repeated animal offerings.

The Royal Priesthood of the Baptized



All faithful participate in Christ's mission through prayer, sacrifice, and active charity.

How the Common Priesthood is Exercised

Action Category	Examples of Practice	Public Witness
Interior Devotion	Prayer, contrition, and fasts	Worship and praction
Active Charity	Giving alms and good acts	Worship and martyrdom

The New Temple of God

From Buildings to Living Stones



The physical Jerusalem Temple is replaced by the Church—the Mystical Body of Christ.



You are a Temple of the Spirit
Through Baptism, God no longer dwells in a building but within his people.

Building the Spiritual House



Believers are "living stones" built on Christ, the cornerstone, to offer spiritual sacrifices.

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Using today’s readings as our reference point, we can begin to understand that God creates humanity for priestly service in his holy place, Israel’s Temple worship trains the people for communion with God, and in Christ that priestly calling and temple-reality are fulfilled—so the baptized become a *royal priesthood*

and a *living temple* by the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, there are two subjects for reflection: (1) Priesthood—from Adam commissioned to serve in God’s garden-sanctuary, through Israel’s ordained priests, to Jesus Christ who shares his priestly life with the Church, making believers a royal priesthood. (2) Temple—from Eden as God’s dwelling, through Tabernacle and Temple, to Jesus as the true meeting-place of God and humanity, and finally the Church and each baptized person as a living temple of the Holy Spirit.

Today’s First Reading shows the Church learning that true worship (word and prayer) must produce ordered charity, and that Christ’s priestly mission is shared by the whole baptized people as a “royal priesthood,” not only by a single class or a single sacred space. God’s desire for Israel as a “chosen people” and “royal priesthood”¹ is fulfilled in the New Covenant through the Church in which the Lamb has truly established for God “*a kingdom and priests... who shall reign on earth.*”²

In the beginning, God created humanity in his “*image and likeness,*” a phrase charged with royal and temple meaning: God appoints his image-bearer to represent his rule in the world and to live in God’s presence. As the story unfolds, Adam stands at the head of the human family as the fountainhead of later “types,” because his image and likeness is passed on to his offspring.³ From the start, therefore, Adam’s vocation is covenantal: he receives both a royal task, to “*have dominion*” and “*subdue*” the earth, and a priestly task, to serve in, and guard, God’s sanctuary-garden.

Genesis 1–2 commissions Adam and his bride to rule the earth⁴ and to “*work*” and “*keep*” the garden.⁵ Later Scripture reflects on this royal calling: humanity is “*crowned... with glory and honor*” and set over the works of God’s hands.⁶ Yet Adam’s task is not merely agricultural. God places him in a sanctuary-garden and charges him to serve in it and guard it—language later echoed in the duties of those who serve and keep watch in Israel’s tabernacle / temple. In this way, Eden functions as the prototype of sacred space, and Adam appears as the prototype priest.

The priestly theme that begins with Adam is not discarded as the story advances; it is intensified and clarified through covenant history. Before Sinai, priestly leadership appears in the patriarchs and household heads who build altars and call on the name of the Lord. In Genesis 14, the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek blesses Abraham, signaling a priesthood not grounded in Levi but rooted in God’s own appointment. Later, at Sinai, the Lord declares his purpose for Israel: “*a kingdom of priests,*”⁷ yet in the Mosaic economy the priestly office is concentrated in the sons of Aaron within the tribe of Levi, with a sacrificial ministry suited to a fallen world. The Old Testament then looks beyond Levi to a coming royal priest: the Lord swears to David’s Lord, “*You are a priest forever... after the order of Melchizedek.*”⁸ The New Testament identifies Jesus Christ as the fulfillment—our eternal High Priest who perfects what the earlier priesthood could only prefigure.⁹

Christ’s priesthood is unique, unrepeatable, and sufficient: he alone offers the once-for-all sacrifice and lives forever to intercede. Precisely because his priestly work is complete, those who are united to him are drawn near and commissioned to serve. Scripture therefore applies priestly language to the whole people

¹ Exodus 19:6

² Revelation 5: 10

³ Genesis 5:3

⁴ Genesis 1:26–28

⁵ Gen 2:15–17

⁶ Psalms 8:5–6

⁷ Exodus 19:6

⁸ Psalm 110:4

⁹ Hebrews 5–7

of God: believers are a “*holy priesthood*” to offer “*spiritual sacrifices*”¹⁰ and a “*royal priesthood*” called to “*proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*”.¹¹ This is not a second atoning priesthood alongside Christ, but a participation in his priest-king calling: worship, witness, and holy service that flows from his finished mediation. While Moses established the Old Covenant, Catholic tradition sees this “chosen” status as a prefiguration of the Church—a community set apart through baptism, serving as a royal priesthood to proclaim God's praises.

Called to form the community of the children of God, which is to say building this kingdom on earth that is open to all. The Second Vatican Council explicitly refers to these texts in the First Letter of Peter and of the Book of Revelation when, referring to the common priesthood that belongs to all the faithful, pointing out the components to enable us to carry it out. “*The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.*”¹² St. Thomas Aquinas mentions at least seven ways that laypeople can act as priests in this Kingdom of Priests: daily devotion, contrition, giving alms, martyrdom, fasts, prayer vigils, good acts, and lastly, worship.¹³

In sum, the Bible draws a clear line: Adam is appointed as priest-king in Eden; the priestly office is developed through the patriarchs, highlighted in Melchizedek, and formalized (and limited) in the Levitical priesthood; and it reaches its goal in Jesus Christ, the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. From that climax, the royal priesthood of the faithful emerges—not as a replacement for Christ’s high priesthood, but as the church’s share in his royal-priestly vocation to worship God, guard holiness, and make God’s glory known to the nations.

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, there’s also a somewhat hidden theme that runs through the readings, and that theme is the temple, our second theme for reflection. To understand the New Testament texts, we must see the importance of the Jerusalem temple for ancient Israelites. It was the focal point of Jewish life—the political, cultural, and of course religious center of the country. It was seen, in almost a literal sense, as the dwelling place of God on earth.

The Bible’s temple-story begins in the garden. Eden is depicted as a place of God’s presence, with boundaries and guardianship, and with humanity commissioned to serve there. After exile, God does not abandon the desire to dwell with his people: he gives Israel the Tabernacle and later the Temple—sacred spaces where heaven and earth “meet” by covenant grace. Temple worship teaches that God is not one object among others in creation; he is the Holy One who nevertheless draws near, providing atonement, purification, and praise as the way back into fellowship.

In the second reading St. Peter addresses the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ,¹⁴ reminding us that through Baptism we have been incorporated into the Church and are now living stones in an edifice constructed with a spiritual and priestly purpose. He urges his followers to come to Jesus “*a living stone... chosen and precious in the sight of God.*” St. Peter highlights the replacement of the stone temple that stood in Jerusalem by the formation of the Church and emphasizes that the Church has become the new royal priesthood established by Christ.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:5

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9

¹² General Audience of 3 November 2004, Pope John Paul II, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City 2004-11-03

¹³ Saint Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans 958

¹⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia | The Encyclopedia Press | New York 1913 AD

In Catholic doctrine, expressing the truths of scripture, “royal priesthood” is the name given to the common priesthood of all the baptized, who are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ,¹⁵ and are therefore incorporated into the Church.¹⁶ *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”*¹⁷ We become living stones to be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.¹⁸ We are *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*¹⁹ That by Baptism we truly participate—according to our own vocation—in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal mission.²⁰

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks temple-language: *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places... I am going to prepare a place for you”*.²¹ The deepest claim comes when Philip asks to be shown the Father and Jesus responds, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father... The Father who dwells in me is doing his works”*.²² The Temple existed so God’s people could know where to go to meet him; Jesus reveals that the final “where” is a who. In him, the Father’s presence is no longer signified only by a building—God’s dwelling is encountered in the Son who makes the Father known.

Christ then, is the true Temple, and by grace Christians become temples of the Holy Spirit.²³ Two things are joined here: Construction of the Church: believers are built into a spiritual house. A priestly vocation: the people become a *“holy priesthood”* that offers *“spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* Personal holiness is not uniquely private to the individual; it participates in the Church’s visible life as a living structure of God’s presence in the world. Catholic theology holds these truths together: the Church is God’s temple not only as an invisible idea, but as a visible communion built on the apostolic foundation—with Christ as cornerstone—and enlivened by the Holy Spirit. This is why the Church’s sacramental life is temple-language in action: in the liturgy, Christ gathers his Body, sanctifies it, and offers it to the Father.

Because Christ brings us into communion with the Father, God’s dwelling expands in a new way. It means God takes up residence in his people by the Holy Spirit, making the Christian life a form of temple-worship in motion. The “temple” is no longer contained by geography; it is carried into homes, workplaces, and streets wherever the baptized live in Christ—guarding holiness, offering praise, and witnessing to God’s mercy.

¹⁵ Christifideles Laici Pope John Paul II. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1988

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:25

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:13

¹⁸ 1 Peter 2:5

¹⁹ 1 Peter 2:9

²⁰ Lumen Gentium. Vatican Council II, Libreria Editrice Vaticana Vatican City 1964-11-21 paragraph 10. Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men,(100) made the new people “a kingdom and priests to God the Father”.(101) The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.(102) Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God,(103) should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.(104) Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them.(105) Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.(2*) The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist.(3*) They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.

²¹ John 14

²² Ibid

²³ Catechism of the Catholic Church #1197 Christ is the true temple of God, “the place where his glory dwells”; by the grace of God, Christians also become the temples of the Holy Spirit, living stones out of which the Church is built. #1198 In its earthly state the Church needs places where the community can gather together. Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apostolic Ministry:** The primary work of the Apostles, identified as preaching, intercession, and the public worship of the Church.
- **Common Priesthood:** The priesthood shared by all the baptized, enabling them to offer spiritual sacrifices and participate in the Church's mission.
- **Cornerstone:** The primary stone used in construction; scripturally, it refers to Jesus Christ as the foundation of the Church, whom some reject and others build upon.
- **Hellenists:** Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who complained about the neglect of their widows in the early Jerusalem community.
- **Living Stones:** A metaphor for believers who, through baptism, are built together into a spiritual house or temple enlivened by the Holy Spirit.
- **Melchizedek:** A biblical priest and king of Salem whose mysterious priesthood (not based on ancestry) prefigures the eternal priesthood of Christ.
- **Ministerial Priesthood:** The hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests who serve the faithful by teaching, ruling, and making the Eucharistic sacrifice present.
- **Mystical Body of Christ:** A theological term for the Church, signifying the organic union of all baptized believers with Christ as their head.
- **Royal Priesthood:** A title for the whole people of God, indicating their dignity and call to announce God's praises and reign with Him.
- **Spiritual Sacrifices:** The offerings of a holy life, including prayer, work, and charity, which believers unite to the perfect sacrifice of Christ.
- **The Twelve:** The original group of Apostles who provided leadership and spiritual governance to the early Church.

Parish Handout — Fifth Sunday of Easter: How today's readings teach Priesthood and Temple

Reading 1 — Acts 6:1–7

- **Priestly priorities (apostolic ministry):** The apostles insist that prayer and the ministry of the Word remain central. In Catholic life, this points to the Church's apostolic ministry—preaching, intercession, and the Church's public worship.
- **Ordained service (diaconal pattern):** Seven men are chosen, presented, and set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. The Church recognizes here an early pattern of ordained diaconal service, ordered to charity and good order within the community.
- **Temple fulfillment:** “A large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith”: Temple ministers are drawn into Christ's new covenant, where worship is fulfilled not by repeated animal sacrifice but by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, made sacramentally present in the Church's liturgy.

Responsorial Psalm — Psalm 33

- **Priestly praise:** The psalm summons the righteous to rejoice and give thanks—language of liturgy. A priestly people is a praising people.
- **Temple trust:** “We place our trust in you” is the interior posture Temple worship sought to form: reliance on God's mercy rather than self-justification.
- **Mercy and covenant:** God's steadfast love is not vague optimism; it is covenant faithfulness that sustains the people and makes communion possible.

Reading 2 — 1 Peter 2:4–9

- **Temple:** The Church is a “spiritual house” built of “living stones.” God's dwelling is now personal and communal—formed around Christ the cornerstone.
- **Priesthood:** Christians are a “holy priesthood” offering “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The offering is real, but it is offered *through* Christ, not apart from him.

- **Royal priesthood and mission:** The purpose is proclamation: to “announce the praises” of God. Priesthood is not only about what happens inside worship; it overflows into witness.

Gospel — John 14:1–12

- **Temple access:** Jesus speaks of the Father’s house and prepares a place—he is opening access to God’s dwelling.
- **Priestly mediation:** “No one comes to the Father except through me.” This is priestly language: Christ is the mediator who brings humanity into communion with the Father.
- **God-with-us, interiorly:** “The Father who dwells in me” reveals that God’s presence is encountered in the Son; this prepares the way for understanding believers as God’s dwelling by the Spirit.
- **Works flowing from communion:** Those who believe will “do the works” Jesus does—worship and mission joined, as in the life of a priestly people.

Implications for Christian life

1. **Guard the sanctuary:** If you are a living temple, holiness is not optional. Repentance and conversion are acts of “keeping” God’s dwelling place; the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a privileged way Christ cleanses his temple.
2. **Offer spiritual sacrifices at Mass:** Place your daily work, family life, generosity, and suffering on the altar by consciously uniting them to Christ in the Eucharist.
3. **Let liturgy form charity:** Like Acts 6, hold prayer and the Word at the center, and let them shape concrete care for those in need—so that service flows from worship and returns to worship.
4. **Live as a built-together house:** “Living stones” implies communion. Unity with your parish and bishop, patience, and mutual accountability are temple-work.
5. **Discern and support vocations:** The Church needs the holiness of all the baptized and also the gift of the ministerial priesthood and diaconate (and consecrated life) to serve the people of God.

Summary

Today’s readings present one unified Catholic vision: God restores humanity’s priestly vocation and temple-communion through Jesus Christ, and he makes that restoration tangible in the Church’s sacramental life.

- **Adam to Christ:** Humanity’s first calling is priestly—serving and guarding God’s holy place—fulfilled and healed in Christ the true Priest.
- **One priesthood, two participations:** All the baptized share in Christ’s common priesthood, while bishops and priests share in his ministerial priesthood, ordered to serve the faithful through Word and sacraments.
- **Temple fulfilled:** Eden, Tabernacle, and Temple foreshadow Jesus, in whom the Father is made known and access to God is opened (Jn 14).
- **Living temple:** The Church is a spiritual house of “living stones,” indwelt by the Holy Spirit, offering worship that becomes a life of holiness and charity (1 Pt 2).
- **Eucharistic center:** The Mass makes present Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice so that the faithful can unite their spiritual sacrifices to his perfect offering.

Discussion questions (for small groups or adult formation)

1. How do you understand the relationship between the common (baptismal) priesthood and the ministerial priesthood in the life of the parish?
2. Where do you see the “spiritual house” of 1 Peter 2 being built up in parish life—and where are the weak points that need strengthening?
3. How does John 14 change the way you think about encountering God through the sacraments and the Church?
4. What does Acts 6 teach about keeping worship, preaching, and charity in right relationship?
5. What practical step would help you live more intentionally as a living temple of the Holy Spirit this week?

Choose 1–2 questions for prayer and one concrete action this week.

1. How can I prepare for Sunday Mass (and receive Holy Communion) with greater faith—through prayer beforehand, attention to the readings, and thanksgiving afterward?
2. What is one “spiritual sacrifice” from my week (work, parenting, illness, stress, joy) that I will intentionally place on the altar at Mass?
3. Is there anything in my life that is “defiling the temple”—and when will I go to Confession to let Christ cleanse and restore me?
4. Where is God calling me to serve in the parish’s works of charity (visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, supporting the grieving, welcoming newcomers), and what is my next step?
5. How am I supporting the Church’s ordained ministry—praying for our bishop, priests, and deacons, encouraging vocations, and speaking about the priesthood with gratitude and respect?
6. How can my home become more visibly a “domestic church” this week (a simple family prayer, Scripture at meals, forgiveness, an act of mercy together)?
7. Who is one person I can invite back to Mass, invite to a parish event, or simply accompany with patient friendship as a witness to Christ?
8. What commitment of time, talent, or treasure can I make this month to strengthen the parish as a living temple—so that worship and charity both flourish?

Closing prayer: Father, through Jesus Christ our true Priest and Cornerstone, build us into a spiritual house. Purify us by your mercy, fill us with the Holy Spirit, and teach us to unite our lives to Christ’s sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist. Bless your Church with holy bishops, priests, and deacons, and make all the faithful a living proclamation of your wonderful light. Amen.