

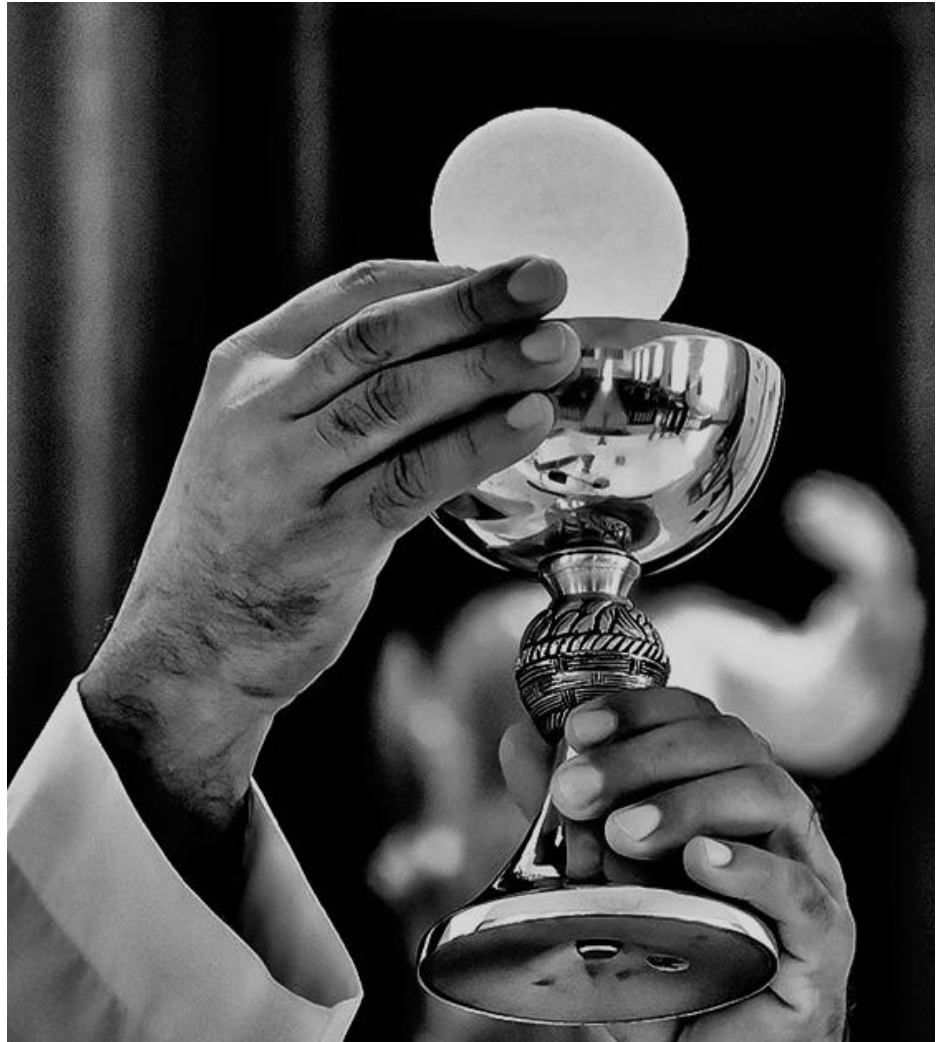
The Catholic Underground

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We Need Better Priests

Recently, I found myself at a conference that emphasized the importance of the laity. Comments like “we need more lay leaders” or “the future of the Church is in the laity” came from various sources. It makes sense that these ideas would arise, as many societies and organizations today are striving toward similar goals. In business, companies aim to be employee-owned; governments seek to be more democratic; even small clubs make decisions through majority vote elections. While I don’t intend to discuss the merits and drawbacks of democracy in such structures, I believe our Church is not designed this way and should examine the weaknesses that calls for “lay leadership”



highlight. I’m not convinced that lay leadership is the solution we’re hoping for. The Church is one of structure and authority. From its inception, Jesus commanded Peter to care for His sheep, establishing him as the rock and foundation of Catholicism. We believe in Apostolic Succession, which began with Christ’s authority and was entrusted to Peter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 18:18-20, CCC 77).

The structure of the Church places Christ at the top, as King of the Universe, followed by bishops with teaching authority, then priests, deacons, and finally the laity.

Certainly, saints can emerge from any walk of life, and some Doctors of the Church have been lay religious sisters or non-clergy religious. However, these figures always showed great respect for the Church’s hierarchy. St.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus (commonly known as St. Thérèse of Lisieux) sought the pope's permission, recognizing his authority, to enter the Carmelite Order. Like her, and all saints in heaven, we must respect the God-given authority of the Church, honoring our deacons, priests, and bishops, beginning with our local parish and extending through the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and ultimately to the Holy See in Rome, where Pope Francis follows Peter's authority. The Church appoints individuals who bear the burden of the Cross to care for the souls of their communities. Our role is to help them by obeying and following their guidance as we would Christ's. However, if our clergy fail to provide direction, the faithful struggle to stay aligned with the Church. While it's not

bad for laypeople to take initiative—on the contrary, it's a wonderful thing—I believe we still need strong clerical leaders to bring those initiatives to fruition.

When priests rely too heavily on lay ministers to run everything, they risk becoming mere supervisors or managers, instead of the servant leaders they are called to be. Priests are meant to act in persona Christi capitis, or in the person of Christ, the head. Christ walked with His disciples, delegating roles as necessary, but always fully embracing His role as the sacrificial lamb. I am willing to walk alongside a priest, following the direction of our bishops and Rome, but I expect them to bear the Cross and chalice as Christ did. I expect them to be strong, virtuous leaders, willing to

sacrifice for the Church, their bride. Our priests need to step up and fill the roles that have been left wanting. We, the laity, are eager to help and do everything we can for the Church, but priests must take ownership of their share in the Cross of Christ. Priests must represent Church teachings and uphold their role as spiritual fathers with the utmost respect. They must show their efforts to serve their communities, honor the Eucharist, and demonstrate what true love for Christ looks like. Their priesthood should be their highest honor in Christ. While a priest may be more than just a priest, his primary calling is to minister to the Church of Christ through the sacraments. The Church will certainly benefit from lay leaders, but its true fulfillment will always lie in virtuous priests.

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