

## Why Do We Need to Talk about the Laity?

The question, “Why do we need to talk about the laity?” rests on the Catholic claim that the secret of our life’s purpose and mission is to be found first and foremost in *who* God created us to be. There is a Latin saying that captures this well, *agere sequitur esse*. Loosely translated it means, “what you do follows from who you are.” Do you want to know what you are supposed to do? Then first know who you are!

So who are the laity? Well, we could say it simply using a negation: The laity are Baptized Christians who are not ordained clerics or consecrated religious. But it seems better that we begin with a positive definition.

Etymologically, the word laity comes from the Greek noun, *laos*, which simply means “people.” But we are not just any people. We are *God’s* people. In the beginning, God made us in His image and likeness, binding us to Himself as His own people by a covenant of faithful love that is as radical and as total as the covenant of marriage.

So what was our original “lay” covenant mission? To live as royal and prophetic priests whom God has called to serve as stewards, cultivating the world with God, harvesting the fruits of righteousness and offering all things back to God—along with ourselves—as a sacrifice, thanksgiving, and praise.

This we do above all by keeping God’s holy commandments, which direct us to live in accord with the divine image, living lives of justice, truthfulness, fidelity, love, patience, kindness, generosity, and mercy. Living as God does, acting as he acts.

But we sinned, broke that covenant and became “no-people” (1 Pet. 2:10). But God, who is rich in mercy, has never ceased to pursue humanity, wooing us back to Himself in order to reestablish our original covenant. That’s the whole Bible, God in search of man. That’s Jesus, God-with-us to redeem and restore us through faith and Baptism as his covenant people, empowering us to fulfill our mission and open to us the hope of eternal life.

This is what we mean by *laity*. All of God’s holy people who have been made disciples of Jesus, sons and daughters of the Most High God, Temples of the Holy Spirit who have been consecrated and sent out to fill this world’s darkness with the light of the Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

Everything else we decide to do in life is, in one way or another, simply an expression of this one core mission: to live and love the world like Jesus to the glory of God the Father.



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