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JEZUS CHRYSZTUS NAJWYŻSZY KAPŁAN W ŚWIETLE *LISTÓW DO KAPŁANÓW NA WIELKI CZWARTEK* JANA PAWŁA II

JESUS CHRIST THE HIGH PRIEST IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN PAUL II'S *LETTERS TO PRIESTS FOR HOLY THURSDAY*

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono analizę *Listów do kapłanów na Wielki Czwartek* Jana Pawła II. Opublikowane na przestrzeni całego pontyfikatu pisma adresowane do społeczności kapłanów podejmują wiele tematów związanych z życiem kapłańskim. Ich cechą wspólną jest perspektywa antropologiczna. W analizowanych pismach Jan Paweł II dokonuje opisu kwestii związanych z kapłaństwem ministerialnym, m.in. roli kapłana w życiu wspólnoty Kościoła czy tożsamości i duchowości kapłańskiej z akcentem położonym na Chrystusa. Autor przeprowadził badania i wyróżnił charakterystyczne cechy, które pojawiają się w dyskursie dotyczącym kapłaństwa Jezusa Chrystusa.

Słowa kluczowe: Jezus Chrystus, kapłaństwo, Eucharystia, Jan Paweł II, listy

Abstract

JESUS CHRIST THE HIGH PRIEST IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN PAUL II'S *LETTERS TO PRIESTS FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY*

This article presents an analysis of John Paul II's *Letters to Priests for Holy Thursday*. Published throughout his pontificate, the letters, addressed to the community of priests, deal with many topics related to priestly life. Their common feature is an anthropological perspective. In the analyzed writings, Pope John Paul II describes issues related to the ministerial priesthood, such as the role of the priest in the life of the Church community, or priestly identity and spirituality with an emphasis on Christ. The author has conducted research and articulated the characteristic features that emerge during the discourse on the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, priesthood, Eucharist, John Paul II, letters

Introduction

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation of John Paul II *Pastores dabo vobis* was devoted to the ministerial priesthood, presenting it in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion, which became a fundamental criterion, principle, principium in defining the priest's identity¹. The source of this priesthood is the Holy Trinity, which, revealing itself in the mystery of the Church, also reveals the priestly identity². "The priest, by virtue of the consecration received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is sent by the Father through Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the People of God, to whom he is configured in a special way, to live and act in the power of the Holy Spirit at the service of the Church and the salvation of the world."³ Thanks to the priesthood received, which flows from the depths of the incomprehensible mystery of God, that is, from the love of the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the gift of the unity of the Holy Spirit, the priest is sacramentally entered into communion with the Bishop and other presbyters in order to serve the People of God, which is the Church, and to attract all to Christ⁴. The aforementioned document, based on the ecclesiology of communion, draws attention to the ministerial priesthood of the faithful in addition to the hierarchical priesthood.

¹ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation „Pastores dabo vobis”*, 12 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 1992), p. 31.

² John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation „Pastores dabo vobis”*, 12, 31.

³ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation „Pastores dabo vobis”*, 31.

⁴ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation „Pastores dabo vobis”*, 12, 31-32. On the subject of the priesthood in terms of John Paul II, a significant number of studies have been written that subtract the issue of the ministerial priesthood, acting in persona Christi. However, so far no one has analyzed the question of Christ's priesthood in terms of John Paul II. See: Jacek Bramorski, „Kapłaństwo jako dar z siebie w życiu i myśli Jana Pawła II”, *Studia Gdańskie* 26 (2010): pp. 43–66; Krystyna Czuba, „Tożsamość kapłańska – sacerdos alter Christus – w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, *Collectanea Theologica* 80, 1 (2010): pp. 81–97; Waldemar M. Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, *Roczniki Teologii Dogmatycznej* 57, 2 (2010): pp. 31–38; Dariusz Guziak, *Więź miłości kapłana z Chrystusem jako istotny element duchowości kapłańskiej w świetle nauczania Jana Pawła II* (Kraków: Papieska Akademia Teologiczna w Krakowie. Wydział Teologiczny, 2005); Dariusz Kuliński, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa służebnego w ujęciu Jana Pawła II”, in: *Chrystologiczna perspektywa św. Jana Pawła II*, ed. Bogusław Kochaniewicz, Maciej Witała (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza. Wydział Teologiczny, 2021), pp. 37–54; Jan D. Szczurek, „Kapłaństwo Jana Pawła II zakorzenione w nauczaniu «Vaticanum II»”, in: *Kapłaństwo w życiu i nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, ed. Jan Machniak (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II, 2010), pp. 13–27; Michał Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, *Polonia Sacra* 13 (2009): pp. 39–50; Wojciech Zyzak, „Zjednoczenie kapłana z Chrystusem i działanie «in persona Christi» w nauczaniu Sługi Bożego Jana Pawła II”, in: *Kapłaństwo w życiu i nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, ed. Jan Machniak (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II, 2010), pp. 29–47; Jerzy Swędrowski, „Tożsamość kapłańska według Jana Pawła II”, *Polonia Sacra* 24, 2 (2020): pp. 83–97; Mauro Piacenza, *Chrystus tożsamością kapłana* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM, 2011); Stefan Schudy, „Kapłaństwo Jezusa Chrystusa w nauce Vaticanum II”, *Collectanea Theologica* 39, 4 (1969): pp. 15–32; *Od Melchizedeka do Jezusa – Arcykapłana. Biblia o kapłaństwie*, ed. fr. Dariusz Dziadosz, *Analecta Biblica Lublinensia* 5 (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010); Tomasz Nawracała, „Wieczne kapłaństwo Chrystusa”, in: *Iustitiam in caritate: opuscula Georgio Troska septuagenario dedicata*, ed. Damian Bryl, Feliks Lenort, *Opuscula Dedicata* 7 (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza. Wydział Teologiczny. Redakcja Wydawnictw, 2012), pp. 65–77.

A different perspective is revealed by the Letters to Priests for Maundy Thursday published in the years 1979–2005 of the pontificate of John Paul II. Their rich content has so far been partially elaborated. The conducted analyzes referred to issues related to priestly spirituality, the sacrament of ministerial priesthood or selected aspects of a pastoral nature. The subject of Jesus Christ as the High Priest has not yet been developed, hence the idea of presenting the priesthood of Jesus Christ, which is the foundation for the hierarchical and common priesthood⁵. It seems that the results of the conducted research will supplement the current state of knowledge concerning the Christology of John Paul II.

1. The priesthood of Christ in relation to the Father

One of the hallmarks of papal thought on the priesthood of Jesus Christ is the Trinitarian dimension⁶. John Paul II, emphasizing the unification of divine and human nature in the person of the Eternal Son, drew attention to his consubstantial nature with the Father, which in turn led to drawing attention to the exceptional and unrepeatable character of his priesthood⁷. At the same time, the eternal generation of the Son by the Father was shown in connection with the eternal plan of salvation. God's will was an eternal, perpetual priesthood pertaining to the New and Eternal Covenant. In other words, it was the will of the Father that through the Incarnation the Only Begotten Son should become the priest of the eternal Covenant⁸.

The priesthood of Christ in God's eternal plan was determined by the event of the incarnation, which appeared as *kenosis* – God's abasement, reaching its culmination on Calvary⁹. The high priestly prayer of Jesus, which preceded his passion, revealed him united with the Father, ready to return to him through self-sacrifice, willing to offer man a share in his union with the Father¹⁰. "Only the Son, the Word of the Father, who and through whom all things were created, can offer creation continually as a sacrifice to the Father, confirming that,

⁵ John Paul II, *Dar i tajemnica* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM, 1996), p. 7; Jan Paweł II, *Wstańcie, chodźmy!* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM Archidiecezji Krakowskiej, 2004), pp. 10–12; Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, pp. 31–38.

⁶ Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, p. 44.

⁷ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (12.03.1989)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XII/1 (1989) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), p. 543; Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, p. 34.

⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (17.03.1996)”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIX/1 (1996) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), p. 554.

⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXIII/1 (2000) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), p. 424.

¹⁰ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, p. 424.

since he comes from God the Father, he can become a sacrifice of praise for the Creator¹¹." The only-begotten Son of the Father, becoming man, entered the order of creation as the one and eternal Priest¹².

2. The priesthood of Christ in the mystery of the Incarnation

The second dimension of Pope John Paul II's reflection on the priesthood of Christ was his close bond with the mystery of the Incarnation¹³. It is not surprising, then, that the institution of the Eucharist has been read in this light. The words uttered by Christ at the Last Supper: "Take and eat, this is my body" instituted the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ which, as the Son of God, he received from the Virgin Mary¹⁴. Therefore, the flesh and blood received from the Mother became for us the sacrament of eternal life.

Christ's priesthood is not accidental: "it is not a task that he could not undertake, but it is inscribed in his identity as Son Incarnate¹⁵." Thanks to the Incarnation, the Son of God became the only Mediator between God and people¹⁶. Therefore, his priesthood is immutable, eternal, permanent and universal¹⁷. It is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies; the fulfillment of the priesthood of the Old Covenant¹⁸.

3. The priesthood of Christ in the mystery of redemption

The analysis of the Letters to Priests for Maundy Thursday shows that the papal reflection on the priesthood of Christ was focused on the mystery of redemption. In this perspective, the Last Supper is the beginning of Christ's "hour"¹⁹. This "hour" opens the time that initiates the

¹¹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (17.03.1996)”, p. 555.

¹² John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (17.03.1996)”, p. 554.

¹³ Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, p. 44.

¹⁴ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (25.03.1995)”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVIII/1 (1995) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), p. 588.

¹⁵ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, p. 426.

¹⁶ Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, p. 34.

¹⁷ Waldemar Fac notes that “Jesus Christ is a priest in the ontological sense, because he is a priestly being, namely someone who is ontically God and at the same time a man, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Creator and in his humanity a creature. Therefore, the foundation of such a priesthood is the incarnation, in which the reconciliation of man with God is absolutely perfect.” Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, p. 34.

¹⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, 424.

¹⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. X/1 (1987) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 1318.

transformation of the priesthood. It is filled with new content; it is understood as a vocation and a ministry²⁰.

At the Last Supper, Christ's priesthood became the sacrament of the Church. This means that through the sacrament of baptism, the faithful are consecrated to offer spiritual sacrifices in union with the one Sacrifice of the Redeemer. All the baptized, being the people of the New Covenant, become a royal priesthood in Christ (1 Pt 2:9)²¹.

Christ's washing of the apostles' feet revealed that His earthly mission was connected with ministry. Everything he did and taught had the overriding purpose of redemption. This saving ministry was inscribed in the priesthood of Christ. This is confirmed by the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of Christ's saving sacrifice. Christ came to serve, he is sacramentally present in the Eucharist to continue to serve²². This ministry appears as the fullness of saving mediation: Christ has entered the eternal sanctuary to "now appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24).

On the other hand, Christ's prayer in Gethsemane revealed that the overriding purpose of His mission was to fulfill the eternal will of the Father²³. Asking the Father to take away the cup he was about to drink, he pointed to the eternal plan that was to be realized²⁴. However, in the words: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42), he emphasized his saving love for man and his full union with the will of the Father²⁵.

John Paul II, meditating on Christ's priesthood, emphasized that it is eternal and definitive, just as his sacrifice was eternal and definitive²⁶. He pointed out that it is inextricably linked to his sacrifice on the Cross, and therefore is rooted in the work of redemption.

The unique character of this priesthood is evidenced by the fact that he was the priest of his own sacrifice, that is, he was both Priest and Victim²⁷ – *Sacerdos et Hostia*²⁸. The Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, once and for all, was combined with the established

²⁰ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, 1318.

²¹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (12.03.1989)”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XII/1 (1989) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 542.

²² John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (12.03.1989)”, 545.

²³ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, 1319.

²⁴ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, 1320.

²⁵ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, 1321.

²⁶ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (12.03.1989)”, 541.

²⁷ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (17.03.1996)”, 559.

²⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, 427; Fac, „Chrystologia kapłaństwa”, 34; Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, 41.

bloodless "memorial" of this Sacrifice, entrusted to the Church²⁹. Christ, entrusting to the apostles and their successors the act of transforming bread into his body and wine into his blood, desired that from now on he would become sacramentally through the hands of priests³⁰.

4. The priesthood of Christ and the Eucharist

John Paul II also drew attention to the close bond between the priesthood of Christ and the Eucharist. He recalled that Maundy Thursday was not only the day of the institution of the Eucharist, but also of the sacrament of Holy Orders³¹. The words: "This is my body, which will be given for you" are closely related to the priesthood, as evidenced by the words entrusted to the apostles: "Do this in memory of me"³². The words establishing the Eucharist not only anticipate what will be accomplished the next day³³. The act performed "in his memory" by priests will make present in every generation of Christians the work accomplished by Christ. Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, the bloody sacrifice of Calvary will be present unbloody³⁴.

By instituting the sacraments of the Eucharist and priesthood during the Last Supper, Christ initiated the Paschal Triduum. At its center was the Body of Christ, which, before being subjected to passion and death, was offered as food³⁵. Saying the words: "Do this in remembrance of me", the Savior put a Eucharistic seal on the mission of the apostles, and by uniting them in sacramental communion, he ordered them to perpetuate this holy gesture³⁶. Saying significant words, he also embraced the successors of the apostles, who, distributing the Food of life to all ends of the earth, would prolong their mission³⁷.

²⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo 1997”, w: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XX/1 (1997) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 466.

³⁰ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (23.03.2000)”, 428-429.

³¹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (16.03.1986)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. IX/1 (1986) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), p. 743.

³² John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, p. 1318.

³³ John Paul II, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, p. 40.

³⁴ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, p. 1318.

³⁵ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (25.03.1995)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVIII/1 (1995) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), p. 588.

³⁶ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (28.03.2004)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXVII/1 (2004) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), p. 391. The issue of the priest's union with Christ, expressed in the formula "in persona Christi", was the subject of research by Wojciech Zyżak. Zyżak, „Zjednoczenie kapłana z Chrystusem i działanie «in persona Christi» w nauczaniu Sługi Bożego Jana Pawła II”, pp. 29–48.

³⁷ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (28.03.2004)”, p. 391.

The priesthood of Christ, thanks to its close bond with the Eucharist, is a call to participate in the divine-human reality of salvation and redemption³⁸. Its source is the Eucharist³⁹. As the Pope noted: "There is no Eucharist without the priesthood, just as there is no priesthood without the Eucharist."⁴⁰ In the Letter to Priests for Maundy Thursday 2004, the Pope stated, among other things: "The same mystery of sanctification and love, the work of the Holy Spirit through which bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, is at work in the person of the priest at the moment of Holy Orders. There is therefore a specific reciprocity between the Eucharist and the Priesthood, a reciprocity that goes back to the Cenacle: it is a question of two sacraments instituted simultaneously, indissolubly linked until the end of the world⁴¹.

The relationship between the sacraments instituted by Christ at the Last Supper is revealed in the ministerial priesthood. This priesthood enables the priest to act *in persona Christi*⁴². It culminates in the consecration of the bread and wine, repeating the gestures and words of Jesus at the Last Supper⁴³. The priest pronounces the words of the institution of the Eucharist *in persona Christi* in order to make present on the altars the sacrifice that took place once and for all on Calvary. These words contain clear indications for priestly spirituality. If the whole Church lives thanks to the Eucharist, priestly life should have a special title of "Eucharistic shape". The words of institution must therefore be for us not only a formula of consecration, but a "formula of life"⁴⁴. Acting in persona Christi also indicates sacramental identification with the True and Eternal Priest. In the letter "On the Worship of the Eucharist" there are significant words: "The priest celebrates the Holy Sacrifice "in persona Christi" - that is, more than "in the name of" or "in place of" Christ. "*In persona*" means: in a specific sacramental identification with the True and Eternal Priest, who alone is the true and legitimate Subject and Author of this Sacrifice of his"⁴⁵.

The words of consecration, uttered by Christ at the Last Supper, were linked by the pope with a commitment to priests. *Accipite et manducate... Accipite et bibite* – "Christ's total

³⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, p. 1319.

³⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (28.03.2004), p. 390..

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Dar i tajemnica*, p. 75.

⁴¹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (28.03.2004), 390.

⁴² Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, p. 40.

⁴³ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (28.03.2004), p. 390.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.03.2005)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXVIII (2005) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), p. 219.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *List „O kulcie Eucharystii”*, no 8 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 1999), 23; Łukoszek, „Działanie «in persona Christi» jako udział w kapłaństwie Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II”, p. 43.

self-giving, which has its source in the trinitarian life of God-Love, reaches its highest expression in the sacrifice on the Cross, whose sacramental anticipation is the Last Supper. It is impossible to repeat the words of consecration without feeling that we are part of this spiritual current. In a certain sense, the priest must also learn to say them to himself, in truth and with generosity: "Take and eat". His life has meaning, in fact, if he is able to make himself a gift, putting himself at the disposal of the community, at the service of anyone in need⁴⁶.

The words *Hoc est enim corpus meum quod pro vobis tradetur*, notes John Paul II, were spoken for the salvation of all people. Therefore, it is a total and universal salvation. There is no man who would not be subject to the saving power of the Blood of Christ⁴⁷.

On the other hand, the words spoken by Christ: "Do this in memory of me" mean that the Eucharist is not just a memory of an event. The Eucharist not only remembers but sacramentally makes present the death and resurrection of Christ⁴⁸.

5. The priesthood of Christ and the hierarchical priesthood

The priesthood of Christ is the first source and expression of constant concern for man's salvation, which allows us to look at Him as the Good Shepherd. The words "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn 10:11) refer to the sacrifice of the cross, to the definitive act of Christ's priesthood. They indicate that Christ, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, made the elect participants in his priesthood⁴⁹. Hence it is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ the Mediator⁵⁰. There is no sacramental and ministerial priesthood without the priesthood of Christ⁵¹. In one of his homilies delivered to consecrated persons in the church of St. Anthony in Maputo, John Paul II called the priest *alter Christus*, with the reservation that this is not only a metaphor, but reality, because through the received mark he can act *in persona Christi*⁵². The priesthood is the highest gift, a call to participate in the mystery of Christ, which makes it possible to act in his name. When the priest, at the moment

⁴⁶ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.03.2005)”, p. 219.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.03.2005)”, p. 220.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.03.2005)”, p. 220–221.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (8.04.1979)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. II (1979) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), p. 869.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (16.03.1986)”, p. 743.

⁵¹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.04.1987)”, p. 1322.

⁵² John Paul II, „Discorso pronunciato durante incontro con i laici e i consacrati nella Chiesa di Sant'Antonio a Maputo (Mozambico) (18.09.1988)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XI/3 (1988), (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989), p. 886.

of consecration, says the words: "This is my body given for you" – he acts *in persona Christi*⁵³.

John Paul II, characterizing the bond between the priest and Christ, drew attention to the sacramental character and to the gift of the Holy Spirit received during priestly ordination. "This mark conferred with the sacramental anointing of the Holy Spirit is in them a sign of a more special consecration in relation to Baptism and Confirmation, of a deeper assimilation to Christ the Priest, who makes them his active ministers, in the official worship of God and in the sanctification of the brethren, and in the ministerial authority exercised in the name of Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church. John Paul II called it a sacramental configuration in Christ, concerning every sector of the life of priests⁵⁴. The relationship between the priest and Christ is ontological⁵⁵.

6. The priesthood of Christ and the common priesthood of the faithful

The anointing of the Holy Spirit causes the baptized to be consecrated to form a spiritual temple ready to offer spiritual sacrifices to God⁵⁶. By virtue of the sacrament of baptism, the faithful participate in the triple mission of Christ: prophetic, priestly and kingly. These three functions are interrelated, explaining and enlightening each other. From this triple unity flows the participation of all the baptized in the ministry and mission of Christ⁵⁷.

The common priesthood of the faithful, although essentially different from the ministerial priesthood, is subordinated to it. On the one hand, the ministerial priesthood, with the sacred power it is endowed with, forms the priestly people, celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice in the person of Christ and offers it to God in the name of the entire People of God. On the other hand, the faithful, by virtue of the royal power of their priesthood, participate in the sacrifice of the Eucharist⁵⁸. At the same time, the ministerial priesthood reveals its ancillary dimension to the common priesthood of the faithful. Indeed, when the priest

⁵³ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (13.03.1994)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVII/1 (1994) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), p. 687.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, „Omelia pronunciata durante la Santa Messa con Ordinazioni Sacerdotali a Taegu (5.05.1984)”, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. VII/1 (1984) (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984), p. 1250.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska „Pastores dabo vobis”*, no. 11, p. 31.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (8.04.1979)”, p. 866.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (8.04.1979)”, p. 866.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (8.04.1979)”, p. 867–868.

celebrates the Eucharist and administers the sacraments, he reminds the faithful of their participation in the special priesthood of Christ⁵⁹.

Conclusion

The analysis of John Paul II's Letters to Priests for Maundy Thursday allowed us to formulate the following conclusions. Letters addressed to the community of priests published throughout the pontificate cover many topics related to priestly life. Their common feature is the anthropological perspective. In the analyzed writings, John Paul II makes a phenomenological description of issues related to the ministerial priesthood (the role of the priest in the life of the Church community, priestly identity and spirituality with an emphasis on Christ). Therefore, in the examined documents, the subject of the priesthood of Jesus Christ is not dominant, but appears next to many others. Despite this, the conducted research allowed to highlight the following characteristics that appear in the discourse on the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Firstly, John Paul II, presenting the priesthood of Christ, shows it in the Trinitarian perspective. Recalling that the incarnate Son of God is consubstantial with the Father, he emphasized the uniqueness and uniqueness of Christ's priesthood. The union of two natures in the person of the Incarnate Word makes His priesthood unique, eternal and universal. The multiplicity of sacrifices of the Old Covenant is fulfilled by one self-sacrifice on Calvary.

The second essential feature of this priesthood is that Christ is both Priest and Victim. Consequently, his priesthood is closely linked to the Eucharist. There is no priesthood without the Eucharist, and there is no Eucharist without the priesthood.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the priesthood of Christ is the source of the priesthood for all the baptized. Thanks to the sacrament of baptism, all participate in the common priesthood of the faithful. On the other hand, by participating in the sacrament of Holy Orders, some in persona Christi celebrate the Eucharist, sacrificing it on the altars of the world.

It should be noted that the image of Christ the High Priest contained in John Paul II's Letters to Priests for Maundy Thursday is not particularly original and new. This was not the intention of the Holy Father, who, addressing his words to priests, wanted to remind them of

⁵⁹ John Paul II, „Lettera ai Sacerdoti in occasione del Giovedì Santo (17.03.1996)”, p. 556.

the important issues related to the priestly ministry, while thanking them for their effort and dedication in the pastoral ministry.

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