

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 4

Sacraments of Vocation: Holy Orders

Holy Orders: Sharing in the Priesthood of Christ - The sacraments of initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist - confer a common vocation on all Catholics, a vocation to holiness and to the task of evangelizing the world. Two other sacraments - Holy Orders and Matrimony - are directed to the salvation of others. They also contribute to a person's own salvation, but they do so through their service to others.

Those who receive this sacrament are sent in Christ's name to "feed the Church by the word and grace of God" (LG 11 § 2). It is through the sacrament of Holy Orders that Christ continues the ministry he entrusted to the apostles. Through the service of the ordained ministers - especially bishops and priests - Christ himself becomes visibly present to the Church as its head and high priest.

Father Theodore Hesburgh, once explained how the role and function of the ordained is connected to the ministry established by Jesus: "His role today is the same as it was when Jesus chose his disciples. He told them to go out and teach, baptize, and bring people the grace of salvation. That task doesn't change in any basic way and is relevant to every society, culture, and geography. When the Holy Father came to the United States, he came not as a diplomat but as a priest. He said Masses for thousands, preached to them, blessed them, talked to the United Nations about human rights, peace, and freedom. The world today needs those functions of the priesthood just as they did in the time of Jesus (Extraordinary Lives, p. 264)."

There are two ways for Christians to participate in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ: the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful. The ministerial priesthood differs from the common priesthood in that it is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at unfolding the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ordained minister serves the Church by teaching, leading worship, and governing.

This class focuses especially on the ministerial priesthood, established in the sacrament of Holy Orders which consecrates certain men to one of three degrees of

sacred order: episcopacy (bishops), presbyterate (priests), and diaconate (deacons). The sacrament of Holy Orders confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows those ordained to exercise a "sacred power" on behalf of Christ for his Church (CCC, 1538).

Necessity of the Ministerial Priesthood: The priestly work of Christ remains essential to God's plan for the world. That is why Jesus gave the Church the sacrament of Holy Orders in order to ensure that the priestly work which is necessary to the life of the Church is never forgotten or distorted. '

Through the sacrament of Holy Orders and the ministerial priesthood which arises from it, Christ continues to lead and build up his Church (CCC, 1547). The existence of the ordained ministry, especially bishops and priests, insures that Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the entire community of believers.

The ministerial priesthood enables the Church to celebrate the sacraments; and as long as the Church celebrates the sacraments she does what Christ does. Each time the Church baptizes, she gives life. Each time the Church confirms she gives strength. Each time the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she gives sustenance and nourishment. Likewise each time the Church celebrates the sacraments of Penance or Anointing, she brings forgiveness and healing.

Also, when the Church joins in the celebration of a marriage, she reflects Christ's love; and when she ordains someone she continues the process of consecrating the world to God. Each time the Church celebrates a sacrament she calls all those present to the priestly work which they should be doing in the world. She reminds them of what Jesus has done for them and what they must do for others.

The ordained minister (especially bishops and priests), by the sacred duty he has received, molds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. Bishops, priests, and deacons must proclaim and teach God's word to all people, lead the Church in worship, and guide and rule God's people by imitating Christ's model of humble, service.

From Prairie Farm to Archbishop: In the story below, the Archbishop of Vancouver, Canada, Adam Exner, OMI shares how as a teenager God came calling while doing chores on his family's farm and how he eventually listened and responded, setting the wheels in motion for a vocation to the priesthood and eventually the episcopate.

Though I and my family held the priesthood in high regard, the idea of becoming a priest just didn't take root in me. I had my heart set on being a farmer. I loved farming and looked forward to the day when the home farm would become mine. According to family tradition, I, the youngest, was to inherit the home farm.

One blistering hot day towards the end of July 1946, two of my older brothers and I were working in the bush, cutting down trees by hand with axes, thus preparing the bush to be ploughed under in order to make more arable land.

At noon we went home for lunch. During the meal, my mother advised us not to go back to the bush right after lunch, because it was so hot and she was concerned that we could suffer from sun stroke. "Wait until about three o'clock before returning to work," she said and then added, "I will make dinner later tonight, so you can still get in a full day's work." My two brothers followed Mother's advice. I didn't. I went back to the bush immediately after lunch. Why? Because I was ambitious! I wanted as much land cleared as possible. After all, the home farm would one day be mine.

Back in the bush alone, I worked hard. At a given point I had just cut down a beautiful young poplar tree in the prime of its youth. Hot and drenched in sweat, I sat down on the tree stump for a rest. As I sat there looking at the tree I had just cut down, an unexpected and unsettling interior dialogue emerged in my soul. It began with a deep feeling of sorrow for the young tree I had just cut down.

An inner voice spoke to the tree, "You were in the prime of your youth, healthy, strong, and full of potential, and here I have cut you down. Soon I will lop off your branches, throw you on the pile from where you will be taken home to be cut up and used for firewood. What a way to go!"

Then another inner voice said, "Don't feel bad. When this tree appears before its Maker, it will be able to say, 'I have fulfilled the plan you had in mind for me.'

What about you? Will you be able to say that too when you meet your Maker face to face?" the inner voice asked. I knew then and there that I couldn't.

Until that point in my life I hadn't really thought of what plan God might have for me. I had made my own plans and was feathering my own nest. Relentlessly the inner voice persisted, "Like this tree, you are in the prime of your youth, healthy, strong, and full of potential. Some day you too will be cut down and will meet your Creator. He will ask you, 'What have you done with the gift of life I have given you?' When that moment comes, as surely it will, what would you want to be able to say?"

After some serious thought, I decided that I would like to be able to say, "God I have tried as best I could to use the gift of life you gave me to serve you and to serve my brothers and sisters." Though I was absolutely sure that this is what I would like to say to God at the end of my life, I was deeply shaken by the realization that to become capable of saying that, my life would have to change radically. I would have to give up my dreams and say "yes" to God's plan for me. Then and there, deep within me, in my heart of hearts, I knew what God was asking of me. Then and there, I knew that I would never be at peace until I was ready to dedicate my life to the service of God and his people. Though I knew what I had to do, I was far from ready to do so. My whole interior rebelled and I began a vigorous battle against the idea of giving up my life dreams.

For the rest of the afternoon I worked feverishly in the hope that the pesty, unsettling thoughts that had invaded my soul would go away. They didn't. That evening I was very quiet at dinner and went for a walk afterwards, hoping for relief. No relief came. I went back into the house and picked up a Catholic magazine with the intention of reading the joke section on the last page, again seeking relief. The joke page was there, but the opposite page was filled with pictures and a strong pitch for vocations to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate! That was the last thing I needed! I threw the magazine away and went to the cupboard where the newspapers were kept with the idea of reading the comic section. That would help.

As I was about to open the drawer, an inner voice said, "This is really bothering you; maybe you should ask some questions or seek some advice." I quickly

decided that I wasn't ready to do so and opened the drawer. The newspapers were there, but for some unexplainable reason there was a prayer book on top of the newspapers. I had never seen it there before. The prayer book was open and in big bold print glaring at me were the words from the gospel of St. Luke (11:9), "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you." This was just too much. I'd had it. I slammed the drawer shut and went to bed. Needless to say, I couldn't sleep.

For the next two weeks, I slept very little. The little sleep I did get was broken and fitful. Due to lack of sleep and rest, I was beginning to look more and more tired and haggard. Towards the end of these two weeks, one mid-afternoon, while hard at work, I dropped into the house for a drink of water. As I came in, my mother looked at me and said, "What's the matter with you? You look sick." At that moment I surprised myself by blurting out, "Mom, I have to leave home." "My God," my mother exclaimed, "You are sick. Sit down and tell me what is going on." I sat down and told her my story.

She listened intently and then, with tears rolling down her cheeks, said, "I want to tell you something that I have never told to anyone before. Ever since I was a little girl, I have said a prayer to God every day, asking God to give me a good husband and children and asking God to take at least one of my children for his service. When you, the youngest, dropped out of school, my heart sank, but I didn't stop praying; I only changed my intention, saying to God, 'If you don't want one of my children for your service, that is all right, but in answer to my prayers, please give a vocation to a child from another family' Then quietly and with a look that reflected deep inner joy and gratitude, she added, "Maybe God wants one of my children after all."

At this point, all resistance within me melted away and I could say, "Be it done to me according to Your word." I had just taken the first step, a big one, in my faith adventure. I was now at peace with myself and with God and I could sleep again. But in subsequent days, every so often tempting inner voices tried to frighten me, "What have I done? Am I fooling myself? Am I worthy? Am I capable? Is it worth it? Will I be happy?" Whenever these disturbing thoughts emerged, another inner and stronger voice would reassure me saying, "Do not be afraid. I will be with you.

Trust me. I will make you worthy and capable. Just cross one bridge at a time. Walk in faith. With my help, there is nothing you cannot do."

The Importance of Apostolic Succession: We cannot speak of the sacrament of Holy Orders without identifying and understanding the importance of the apostles and apostolic succession. The word apostle means "one sent." Jesus himself was the Father's apostle, sent to preach the good news and bring salvation to all. All of the Gospels record that Jesus chose a special group of twelve of his followers who were charged by him to be his apostles. The gospel of Mark tells us, "He appointed twelve [whom he also named apostles] that they "might be with him and he might send them forth to preach" (Mk 3:14). The Greek word that the evangelist Mark used was *apostoloi*, which can also be translated "emissaries."

Christ gave the apostles a share in the work he was given by his Father. He said to them: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21), and "He who receives you receives me" (Mt 10:40). The twelve apostles were witnesses to Christ's public ministry and to his resurrection.

The apostles not only received a mandate from Jesus to carry out his mission, but the power to accomplish it as well. Giving them a share in the mission he received from his Father, he promised to be with them always through the gift of his Holy Spirit. Thus the mission he gave to the twelve is a permanent one, still carried out by the church today. '

The apostles were the foundation upon which Christ built the Church, and they in turn appointed others to continue their work. They did this by handing on to them the gospel they received from Christ and by means of a laying on of hands. The term "apostolic succession" refers to the continuous and uninterrupted transfer of the preaching and authority that Christ gave to his apostles and which they passed on to their successors, the bishops.

In the early Church there were some who claimed to be apostles who were not. Not all of them, however, were teaching what Christ taught. Some were actually teaching things that were antithetical to Christ's teachings. For example, one group known as the gnostics claimed to have "secret knowledge" of Christ. One of the lessons of their so-called secret knowledge was that the physical world had not been created by God. The gnostics taught that the physical world was

either evil or irrelevant. In response to the gnostics the Church began to formalize some of its beliefs. A universally accepted list of scriptures - the canon of the scriptures – was formed. The Apostles' Creed which outlines the fundamental truths of Christianity was also developed.

But the real issue between the Church and the gnostics could not be settled with a canon of scripture or a creed. The real issue had to do with who had the authority to speak in Christ's name. The Church insisted that Christ had given his apostles the authority to speak in his name. Whatever knowledge he wished to pass on, he would have given to those apostles. They in turn would have passed it on to their successors, the bishops. And, since all of the successors of the apostles rejected the notion of a group possessing secret knowledge, such secret knowledge must not exist.

From that point on it became important for any person or group who wished to speak in Christ's name to demonstrate their direct connection to the apostles. Those bishops who did not have written records connecting them directly to the apostles were still considered to be successors of the apostles and authentic interpreters of Christ if they were in agreement with the rest of the bishops. The most fundamental concept of apostolic succession was solidified, that is, that only those who are direct successors of the apostles have the authority to interpret and teach the message of Christ.

Holy Orders is the sacrament instituted by Christ as the means of handing on his mission and mandate to his apostles and future generations. From Christ, bishops and priests receive the mission and sacred power (faculty) to act in the person of Christ; deacons receive the strength to serve the Church in liturgy, word, and charity in communion with the bishop and priests. Apostolic succession, preserved through the sacrament of Holy Orders, thus protects the Church against an influx of ideas that would undermine Jesus' message.

Apostolic succession not only protects the teaching ministry of the Church, it also protects her sacramental ministry. A person can only act in Jesus' name if he or she has received the grace to do so. That grace is not something the person can bestow on himself or herself. It is something that must be given. Furthermore it can only be given by one who has the authority to give it (see CCC, 875).

Apostolic succession ensures that the priests who act as ministers of God's grace have the authority to do so. Jesus gave his apostles the authority to act in his name in the performance of certain sacramental acts. They in turn passed that authority on to their-successors. Only the apostles and their successors have received the authority to act in the person of Christ during the celebration of the sacraments.

According to Catholic teaching, the effectiveness of the sacraments is not ' dependent upon the goodness of the minister, but it is dependent upon the minister's connection to Jesus from whom the sacraments come. Apostolic succession ensures that the faithful will not be left in doubt as to whether God's grace has been given. If the minister is validly ordained, he has the authority to act in Christ's name and grace will be given. If the minister is not validly ordained, he does not have the authority to act in Christ's name and we cannot presume that grace has been given.

Finally, in addition to the sacramental nature of the ministry of the ordained, apostolic succession also guarantees the ruling nature of the ministry. Christ himself instituted the apostles as "the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy" (Ad gentes, 5). This ministry has a "collegial character," that is, every bishop exercises his rule within the college of bishops in communion with the bishop of Rome, the Pope, who is the head of the college. Priests, too, exercise this ministry from within their diocese under the direction of their bishop.

The Gifts of Ordination: Today the word "ordination" is used to describe the sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, priests, or deacons. The word order has roots in the Roman Empire. It was originally used to refer to an established organization that had a particular purpose or set of responsibilities. Within the Church there have always been established groupings of people which Tradition refers to as orders: the order of bishops, the order of priests and the order of deacons, as well as the order of catechumens, the order of virgins, and the order of widows, to name a few more. In the early Church, official integration into any of these orders involved a rite called ordination. An ordination was a religious blessing or consecration for a specific task.

Today the word ordination is reserved for describing sacramental ordination. Sacramental ordination confers a gift of the Holy Spirit which permits the exercise

of a sacred power. This sacred power comes from Christ through the Church and consists of the ability to act in the person of Christ offering God's grace to others through the sacraments and also in the offices of teaching and ruling. (The fullness of this sacred power is in the consecration of a bishop in the sacrament of Holy Orders.)

When we say that a bishop and his priest designate acts in the person of Christ, we are not saying that he pretends to be Christ, nor are we saying that he is some sort of substitute for Christ. What the Church holds is that Christ works through him in such a way that when the bishop or priest celebrates the sacraments, it is not he who is acting, but Christ who is acting. It is Christ himself who baptizes, who confirms, who offers himself to God the Father during the Mass, who forgives and anoints, who witnesses and blesses a couple's marriage vows, and who, in the case of a bishop, ordains. Also, when the bishop offers the Church a teaching or ruling, he is acting as a representative of Christ who was himself teacher, shepherd, and priest.

The personality of the bishop or priest and the manner in which he behaves during a sacramental celebration may affect how others perceive the sacrament, but they cannot affect the sacrament itself. When he celebrates the sacraments he is a slave to Christ in the truest sense of the word "slave." He is a possession of Christ and his own person is for the most part irrelevant. In his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote that Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (2:7). During the celebration of the sacraments, a bishop or priest, through the power of God's grace, does the same. Whenever a bishop or priest celebrates the sacraments, he "empties" himself of himself, and is "filled" with Christ. This self-emptying occurs because of the grace given in ordination. It does not depend on his willingness to be emptied in any particular sacramental celebration.

Sometimes we think of the position of the bishops and the priests within the Church as a position of power, but in fact it is a position of complete powerlessness. The one who is ordained surrenders his own power to act so that Christ may act through him. When James and John asked Jesus if they could have seats of honor next to him in the kingdom, Jesus asked them if they could drink from the cup from which he had to drink. He was asking them if they could empty themselves completely in the same way that he was about to empty himself (see

Mk 10:35-45). It is this same self-emptying which Jesus requires of those who would hold leadership positions within the Church today. A vocation to the priesthood is a vocation to become insignificant so that Christ may be all important. Think of it this way: "When you go into a Catholic Church, you know that Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament, contained in the tabernacle. This is true because of the actions of a priest. Who that priest was and what he was like were of no importance. All that mattered was that he was a priest, and Christ had worked through him in order to transform the bread into Christ's own body. Without that priest you would not have been able to be in Christ's presence in the same way; and yet the individual identity of the priest was irrelevant. He had left no mark of himself. This is why we say that a priest is a slave of Christ."

Because Christ acts through the priest in the sacraments, the Church also acts through the priest in the sacraments. The Church is the body of Christ; therefore whatever is done in the name of Christ is done in the name of the Church as well. When the priest gives his voice to Christ, his voice becomes the voice of Christ's body, the Church. When the priest baptizes it is Christ who baptizes. Because it is Christ who baptizes, it is the whole Church - the body of Christ - who baptizes. When the priest forgives someone in the sacrament of Reconciliation, it is Christ who forgives. Because it is Christ who forgives, it is also the Church—the body of Christ - who forgives. When the priest offers the body of Christ to God during the Eucharist, it is Christ who is offering himself. Because Christ is offering himself, the whole Church - the whole body of Christ - also offers itself "through him, with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit" (see CCC, 1553).

The presence of Christ acting through the minister does not preserve the minister from all human weaknesses, errors, or sins. The sacrament of Holy Orders does not guarantee that the minister will always empty himself so that he is able to act in the person of Christ. Ordination does not even guarantee that the minister will not harm the Church. There may be times when the minister's own infidelity to the gospel weakens the faith of others or even leads them astray. What the sacrament of ordination does guarantee is that in the celebration of the sacraments the minister will not hinder Christ's grace. The sacrament of Holy Orders changes the character of the minister in such a way that he cannot avoid emptying himself and being filled with Christ when he celebrates the sacraments.

More on Priestly Character: When we talk of someone's "character," we are talking of those attitudes and behaviors which are automatic. We are referring to those things which a person does without thinking whenever he or she is faced with a particular situation. If we say, "it is in her character to teach," we are saying that whenever the opportunity presents itself, she will teach even if she does not particularly feel like teaching. If we say that "it is in his character to be honest," we are saying that he will tell the truth even when telling the truth is uncomfortable or risky. When we say that ordination gives the person who is ordained a new character, we are saying that, in certain situations, ordination changes the automatic response of the one who is ordained. Specifically, ordination changes his automatic behavior during the sacraments.

The Communal and Personal Dimensions of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: The sacrament of Holy Orders gives the person who is ordained a new spiritual character. He is configured to Christ so that he can serve as Christ's instrument within the Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders is not for the benefit of the one who receives it, but rather for the benefit and salvation of others (see CCC, 1534). The bishop, priest, or deacon benefits from ordination only because ordination enables him to serve others, and in serving others he will draw closer to God himself.

Just as the sacrament of Holy Orders is intended for the Church as a whole and not just for the one who receives it, so too the power and authority which is given in the sacrament must be exercised within the Church as a whole and not in isolation. The bishops of the Church exercise their ministry in communion with other bishops and in union with the Pope, not on their own. This "college" or body of bishops receives its authority from its head, the Roman Pontiff, or Pope, in the same way the apostles received authority from St. Peter who was the head of the apostles. The word Pope traces to the Latin and Greek words for "Papa." Due to the virtue of his office as "shepherd of the whole flock" (Jn 21:15), the Pope is pastor of the whole Church and has "full, supreme, and universal power over the Church" (LG 22). The Pope can always exercise his power freely.

Priests exercise their ministry within the presbyterium ("priesthood") of the diocese and under the direction of the diocesan bishop, not on their own. Bishops have the authority to teach in the name of Christ, but only when they teach in union with

one another and with the Pope. Likewise, priests have the authority to, proclaim and interpret the gospel within the local Church when they depend on and are in communion with the bishop.

Even in the celebration of the sacraments, bishops and priests must act in a manner that is in keeping with the Church as a whole. If in celebrating a sacrament a priest or bishop intends to do something other than what the Church normally intends within that sacrament, he is not acting in the person of Christ or with the authority of Christ. Thus, although many of the early Anabaptists were priests, they were not (according to Catholic teaching) acting in the person of Christ when they re-baptized adults who had been baptized as infants. This is because even though they were celebrating a sacrament, they were not intending to do what the Church normally does in baptism.

Although ministry within the Church is always exercised with others, it still has a personal character. Each person who is ordained is called to bear personal witness to the common mission of the Church. He is to practice in his personal life what he proclaims in his public life. Because the one who is ordained has a leadership position in the Church, others will look to him as an example of how to live as Christians. This means that ordination comes with an enormous responsibility to live faithfully. It is for this reason that the Church insists that those who are ordained must shape their life around prayer, especially by praying the liturgy of the hours daily.

The Three Degrees of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: There are three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders: the ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons. The three degrees are a ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ. The orders of bishop and priest enable the one who is ordained to act in the person of Christ, the head of the body, in the celebration of the sacraments. Deacons are ordained to help and serve the priests and bishops in their work. While priests and bishops are configured to Christ in order that they might act as the head of Christ's body, deacons are configured to Christ in order that they might serve as he served.

The fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is found in episcopal ordination—the ordination of bishops. The Pope is the successor to St. Peter as the Bishop of Rome and, because of this, the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. He and his fellow

bishops are the ones who receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to be the visible presence of Christ the teacher, shepherd, and priest. As covered previously, bishops not only have the responsibility for making the grace of God available through the sacraments, they are also responsible for teaching in the name of Christ and ensuring that the teachings of Christ are understood and applied appropriately within the modern world.

The teaching of the Pope and bishops is authentic, as they are endowed with the authority of Christ. This supreme participation in the authority of Christ is ensured by the gift of infallibility. This gift of infallibility has three dimensions. It refers first to the Church as a whole. The Second Vatican Council taught: "The whole body of the faithful... cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals" (LG 12). The second dimension of infallibility refers to the teaching of the college of bishops. The Catechism states: "The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishop when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium, above all in an Ecumenical Council" (891). The third dimension of infallibility refers to the exercise of this gift by the Pope when he makes a particular pronouncement on matters of faith or morals. Again, the language of the Catechism helps us to understand this: "The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful - who confirms his brethren in the faith - he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals" (891). Thus we believe that the teaching of the Pope and bishops in union with him in the matter of faith and morals is protected from error.

The bishop is usually the "proper" or "ordinary" pastor within a diocese. For that reason he is sometimes called the "ordinary" of the diocese. (A bishop appointed to help the ordinary in a diocese is called an auxiliary bishop.) The word bishop itself comes from the Greek *episcopoi* meaning "overseer." Each ordinary is responsible for ensuring that the work of Christ is being done in his diocese. Furthermore, the bishop is the visible source and sign of the unity within his diocese.

All of the bishops together are responsible for ensuring that the work begun by Christ is continuing in all regions of the world. The unity of all of the bishops within the college of bishops under the authority of the Pope is the sign of the unity of the Church throughout the world. When a bishop is ordained he receives the grace of strength from the Holy Spirit. He is given the grace to guide and defend the Church and to show particular love for the poor, the sick, and the needy.

The bishop, as a function of the "sanctifying office," is also the leader in the celebration of divine worship. Through the gift of ordination he provides, he is the "steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood" (LG 26) which his priests offer and he offers personally. The Eucharist is center of the particular diocesan and parish Church. The bishop and his priests make the Church holy by their prayer and work, and by their ministry of the word and of the sacraments.

From his governing office, the Pope and bishops (along with their helpers, priests and deacons) have ruling authority in the Church. All institutions have need of a governing structure so that the work can be done. The ruling office of the Church has one purpose: the growth of faith and holiness. Church law - called "canon law" - includes precepts and rules that regulate the Church. These laws along with other legitimate commands of the Pope and bishops must be respectfully obeyed by all Catholics.

Priests are ordained to be co-workers of the bishops. The word priest comes from the Greek presbyteroi, a name for the elders in the early Church. In a sense priests are the representatives of the bishop in the local congregation. Priests are consecrated to preach the gospel and to act in the person of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Priests are also ordained to baptize, to bless marriages, and to anoint the sick. Priests share in the bishop's ministry of forgiving sins in the sacrament of Penance, and under special circumstances they may also confirm those who have been baptized.

When priests are in union with their bishop they share his authority to act in the person of Christ. The spiritual gift which priests receive in ordination prepares them to preach the gospel everywhere and to participate in the universal mission of salvation; nonetheless, they must be given permission by the local bishop to exercise these gifts. Occasionally a priest is released from the obligations (or even

forbidden) to exercise the gifts received in ordination. He may at the same time be released from the bonds-of priestly celibacy and be allowed to marry. He cannot, however, become a true layman again. This is because the sacramental character which he received in ordination and the grace of the Spirit which enables him to act in the person of Christ in the sacraments still remains.

Deacons are ordained to assist the priests and the bishop in their work within the Church. The word deacon comes from diakonoi, the word which means to serve or specifically "to wait on tables." Through their ordination deacons are configured to Christ who washed the feet of his disciples and made himself the servant of all. Deacons are ordained to read the gospel and to preach at liturgy, to assist the priest during the celebration of the Eucharist in other ways, to assist at and bless marriages, and to preside over funerals. In the Latin Rite deacons also act as ministers of baptism. Deacons have a special responsibility for participating in the Church's works of charity.

There are two types of deacons. There are those who are ordained as deacons as a step toward priestly ordination and there are those who are ordained to the permanent diaconate. The permanent diaconate is the only degree of the sacrament of orders which may be conferred upon a married man in the Latin rite.

The Rite of Ordination: The ordination of a bishop, a priest, or a deacon is very significant to the life of the Church. Therefore it normally takes place in the cathedral (the main church of the diocese) at a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The essential rite for all three degrees of ordination consists in the bishop imposing his hand on the head of the ordinand and offering a prayer of consecration which is specific to the degree of ordination. In the prayer the Church asks God to pour out his Spirit on the one being ordained and to give him those gifts which he will need in order to serve the Church well in his new role. Since the sacrament of Holy Orders is the sacrament of the apostolic ministry, only validly ordained bishops - those who are in the line of apostolic succession can validly confer the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Only a baptized man may validly receive ordination (see the feature "Only Men Can Be Priests," pages 200-202). The Church teaches that it cannot ordain women since Jesus, who chose only male apostles, did not ordain women though , he

stressed their dignity against many repressive laws of his day. Also, as the Catechism teaches, paraphrasing the words of Pope John Paul II, "No one has a right to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. Indeed no one claims this office for himself; he is called to it by God" (1578). It is the Church that has the right and responsibility to call someone to receive orders. Normally, all ordained ministers in the Latin Church (with the exception of permanent deacons) are chosen from men of faith who live a celibate life and intend to remain celibate "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:12).

In the Latin Church before the candidate is ordained he is presented to the bishop and the bishop and the community are assured that he has received the necessary training and been chosen for ordination in accordance with the teaching and practice of the Church. The candidate then is ordained by a bishop who is validly ordained himself. In other words, the bishop officially proclaims him as a man who has been chosen for ministry within the Church. The congregation gives its assent to this election. Then the candidate is instructed in the nature of the duties he is about to assume, and his willingness to accept those duties is examined. This is followed by a recitation of the litany of the saints. The local church calls upon the entire Church on earth and in heaven to pray for the ordinand as he assumes his new role within the communion of saints. The candidate then kneels before the bishop who lays hands on the head of the ordinand and offers the prayer of consecration.

In the Latin rite, the prayer of consecration for a bishop is as follows: Father, you know all hearts. You have chosen your servant for the office of bishop. May he be a shepherd to your holy flock, and a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day, may he always gain the blessing of your favor and offer the gifts of your holy Church. Through the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood grant him the power to forgive sins as you have commanded, to assign ministries as you have decreed, and to loose from every bond by the authority which you gave to your apostles. May he be pleasing to you by his gentleness and purity of heart, presenting a fragrant offering to you, through Jesus Christ, your Son . . . Ordination of Bishops, #26).

There are several additional rites which follow the solemn consecration in the Roman Catholic Church. These rites express and complete the mystery that is

accomplished in ordination: “Bishops and priests are anointed with holy chrism as a sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit given in ordination. The new bishop is then presented with the book of the Gospels as a sign of his apostolic mission to proclaim the word of God. He is given a mitre and a ring as a sign of his office and his fidelity to the Church, the bride of Christ. Finally he is presented with a crosier (staff) as a sign that he is a shepherd of God's people.”

When a priest is ordained, he is given a paten and chalice. These represent the "offering of the holy people" which he is called to present to God. A deacon is given the book of the Gospels because he has received the mission to proclaim the Gospel.

Historical Development of the Sacrament of Holy Orders: The priesthood of the Old Testament prefigured the priesthood of the New Testament. The entire nation of Israel had a priestly role to the world through one tribe. The tribe of Levi was chosen to act as priests within the Israelite community. The Levites had a particular responsibility for the liturgical life of the community; and it was their job to act on behalf of the community in offering gifts and sacrifices to God. But the sacrifices which the flawed human priests could offer were never perfect and could never completely reunite God and humanity.

Jesus came as the one high priest who could offer the perfect sacrifice. He fulfilled the task of the Levitical priesthood. He then chose twelve apostles to continue his priestly work. The number twelve was significant. It symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel and thus the completeness and the universality of the new nation - the Church - which Jesus was founding. The importance of this symbolism was underscored by the fact that the apostles felt that it was necessary to choose someone to replace Judas before they began their formal priestly work (Acts 1:15-26).

The apostles saw their priestly task as missionary. They understood their primary role to be that of bringing the message of Jesus to those who had not yet heard it. As new communities of Christians came into being, the apostles also saw it as their duty to guide them and to settle any disputes which arose. As the number of Christian communities began to gather without an apostle present, an increasing number of false teachers emerged. As mentioned before, many of these used the

name of Christ to teach and do things that were far from what Christ intended. Because of this there was a growing recognition of the need for good order and formal structures for leadership.

Jewish Christian communities adopted the organizational model used in Jewish-synagogues with elders, prophets, and preachers. The early gentile Christian communities developed their own formal structure with bishops (or overseers) and deacons. The elders and bishops were responsible for overseeing the religious and moral life, for ensuring that those in need were cared for, and for safeguarding doctrine. As the number of local communities or parishes outside major centers began to increase, presbyters (priests) were given pastoral care of these parishes. Deacons were ordained to help the bishops, particularly to help* them in caring for those in need.

By the beginning of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch decreed that only a bishop or his appointee was to preside at Eucharist or to baptize. In the early Church, bishops and other Church leaders were chosen by the community as a whole. A person was chosen as bishop because of the apparent presence of the Holy Spirit within him. After his election a bishop received imposition of hands from another bishop. He was ordained to proclaim the word, forgive sins, preside at Eucharist, and supervise the work of presbyters and deacons. Presbyters were ordained by the bishop and other presbyters joined in the laying on of hands at the rite of ordination. Deacons were ordained by the bishop alone, and were ordained specifically to assist the bishop in his ministry.

Following the edict of Constantine and the legalization of Christianity in 313, bishops and presbyters were given civil authority and status. The state gave special privileges to the ordained. The ordained came to be called "clergy" and a gap developed between them and the laity. A view took hold that the clergy were people devoted to "higher things of the spirit" while lay people were obliged to the "lower things of the flesh."

The desire of the people to elect a particular person as bishop was no longer enough to guarantee that he would become a bishop; the approval of the state was also necessary. Still, the Council of Chalcedon (451) stated that priests were to be called by the people of a particular parish and ordained for work within that^

parish. Any other ordination was considered null and void. Bishops and priests were paid salaries by the state.

Between the sixth and twelfth centuries, the increase of the monastic life influenced priesthood a great deal. Though most monks were not priests, many priests did adopt the religious habit,« prayers, study, and strict discipline of monasticism, including celibacy. This movement helped lead to the requirement of celibacy for the ordained in 1215. Prior to this time priests were permitted to be married, though many priests already lived a single, celibate life.

Reaffirming and Re-teaching Priesthood: The Reformation and the ensuing Council of Trent had a dramatic effect on the priesthood. Martin Luther and other reformers emphasized the common priesthood of all believers and said that there was no special ministerial power received through the sacrament of Holy Orders. The Council of Trent countered this argument by asserting that Holy Orders was one of the seven sacraments and stating that bishops, priests, and deacons do not depend on a call from the Church for their authority and power. The Council of Trent inspired reform in the church, including the establishment of seminaries for assisting the preparation of candidates to the priesthood.

The Second Vatican Council reminded the Church of the differences between the ministerial or hierarchial priesthood and the common priesthood, and also pointed out their interrelation. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. Yet, they differ essentially. The common priesthood is exercised by a living out of the baptismal graces. The function of the ministerial priesthood is to help unfold the baptismal graces Q>f all Christians.

What is more, the Council reaffirmed that the role of the priest, bishop, and deacon is not a role of power but a role of service. Priests, bishops, and deacons are ordained not for themselves but for the Church as a whole. They are to facilitate the action of God's grace within the Church so that lay people may receive grace within the sacraments and then carry that grace into the world. Bishops, priests, and deacons are called to do for the Church what the members of the Church are called to do for the world.

Only Men Can Be Priests: In 1995 Pope John Paul II stated that the Catholic practice of ordaining only men to the priesthood was not something that could be

changed. He said that the teaching that priests must be male is part of the "deposit of faith" which the Church has received from Christ. As such, it must be accepted in faith.

For many people living in the twenty-first century this is a very difficult thing to accept even as a matter of faith. We live in a world in which we are becoming increasingly aware of the fundamental equality of men and women. In all areas of life people are making concerted efforts to translate this equality into reality. When we are told that there is something which women cannot do simply because they are women we are quick to suspect injustice.

But the Church's teaching is not rooted in injustice. In fact, in recent years the Church has stressed the fundamental equality of men and women. The Church's teaching regarding ordination is rooted in a belief that although men and women are fundamentally equal, they are not the same. Our gender is not incidental. It is an essential part of who we are. For this reason it has an impact on all of our relationships, including our relationship with God and with God's Church.

When Jesus chose the twelve apostles to carry on his work he chose only men. According to Catholic teaching, this cannot be interpreted as a caving in to the societal norms of his day. Jesus regularly interacted with a group of women. He talked with women as friends in a society in which women and men were not normally friends. He taught women and allowed them to sit at his feet to learn as disciples in a society where women were not normally allowed to learn. He sent women to proclaim his resurrection to the others. Nonetheless, he did not count women among the twelve. Furthermore, when the apostles chose their successors they also did not choose women. Even Mary, the mother of Jesus was not chosen to replace Judas among the twelve even though she was regularly with the apostles.

When the Church says that the practice of ordaining men and men only is part of the deposit of faith, she is saying that if the Church ordained women, a fundamental truth which Jesus wanted to preserve would be lost.

In official pronouncements regarding the inability of the Church to ordain women, the Church's leadership has often stressed the significance of the role of motherhood. Like motherhood, ordination can only be received as an unmerited

gift. Also, as motherhood is not primarily for the benefit of the mother but for the good of the child, priesthood is primarily for the service of others.

It is also important to remember that although women cannot be ordained as priests, they can hold many other leadership positions within the Church. Too often the Church has been influenced by the patriarchal societies around us and has not recognized that the dignity of women is equal to that of men. Too often the Church has excluded women from certain things, not out of fidelity to Jesus' teachings but out of its own sinfulness. All of us within the Church have a responsibility for working to overcome the gender inequalities which are the result of sin within the Church.

Many things which have traditionally been done by those who are ordained do not actually require ordination. Many of the Church's ministries must be exercised under the direction of the bishop, but they can be exercised by ordained and lay persons, by men and women. Furthermore, all baptized Christians - men and women - are called to live out the graces of Baptism by living a life of faith, hope, and charity, according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Called to Serve: Each person has been created by God for a special purpose and is called to serve God in a unique way. When we respond to our call we will find the joy which Jesus promised us, a joy which will fill us to overflowing if we allow it to. God's call to us is an invitation to live in the way that will allow our unique gifts and talents to flourish and to produce a good greater than we would have imagined possible. Our call is an invitation to become the good soil which yields thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold (see Mk 4:20).

It is important to spend regular time in prayer, listening for God's call in our lives. All of us need to ask ourselves how we can best serve God and his people. Unless we do this, we cannot be faithful to the commitments we made in Baptism and Confirmation. Not only should we spend time in private prayer, we should also pray with others in our Church community, and we should take time to share our faith and discuss our sense of call or our inability to hear a call.

Young men should take special care to discern if they have a vocation as a priest, deacon, or religious. In the same way, young women should examine their hearts carefully to see if the Lord is calling them to a vocation as a sister. If you discover

in your heart that God is indeed calling you to one of these vocations, you should find a priest, sister, brother, or trusted teacher to talk over what your heart might be telling you.

God does not call us just for ourselves, but also for others. For this reason we , need the help of others to hear God's call. No person can determine his or her call in isolation; all of us need to rely on the support, prayers, and discernment of other people of faith. We also need to remember that those other people of faith are depending on us. If we think that God is calling someone to a particular ministry, we have a responsibility to tell that person.

Remember: If you think that God may be calling you to a particular ministry as a priest, brother, or sister, take time to find out more about that ministry, to pray about it, and to talk with others about it. Do not try to run away from God. For as St. Augustine said, "our hearts are restless until they rest in God." If God is calling you to do something specifically, even something that appeal's difficult, he will give you the strength and the ability to do it, and he will enable you to find joy in it.