

# The Sacrament of Holy Orders

## Summary from the Catechism of the Catholic Church from articles 1536-1600

### I. Why is this Sacrament Called "Orders"?

- A. The word "order" in ancient Roman culture signified an established civil body, especially a governing body.
- B. Since ancient times, the bodies that the Church designated as orders were the order of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons and some others: the orders of catechumens, virgins, spouses, widows, . . .
- C. The ceremony of incorporation into one of these bodies is called an "ordination". Today, this word is used exclusively of those who are ordained to be a Bishop, Priest or a Deacon.
- D. An Ordination is more than a simple "election, designation, delegation, or institution by the community," for it bestows a gift of the Holy Spirit that enables the ordained to exercise a "sacred power" which can come only from Christ himself through his Church (cf 1538).
- E. An ordination is also called a consecration. To consecrate is to make or declare sacred, to set apart or dedicate for a particular purpose. In this case, the person is set apart by Christ for his Church.
- F. The visible sign of this ordination is the laying on of hands by the bishop, with a prayer of consecration.

### II. Background and Origin of the Sacrament:

- A. Israel, the chosen people, were constituted by God as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
- B. Out of the chosen people, God set apart one of the 12 Tribes, Levi, to carry out the duties of the priesthood: praying for and offering sacrifice for the sins of the rest of the Chosen people. They acted as mediators between God and his people and were consecrated by a special ceremony.
- C. All that the priests of Levi prefigured is fulfilled in Christ, who is the one true mediator between God and man. The priests of Levi had to continually offer sacrifice for sins, but Jesus' one unique sacrifice on the cross purifies all from sin.
- D. The redemptive sacrifice of Christ, accomplished once for all is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. The priests that Christ has consecrated for his Church make this one, unique sacrifice present in the celebration of the Eucharist.
- E. Similarly, the one priesthood of Christ is made present through the ministerial priesthood of the Church--without diminishing the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood (cf CCC 1545).
- F. There are two types of priesthood in the Church:
  1. **The Common priesthood of all Christians:** All who are baptized share in Christ's vocation as priest, prophet and king. The lay persons' priestly call is directed

outward toward the world: praying for others, sacrificing for others, blessing others and leading others to God.

2. **The Ministerial and Hierarchical Priesthood:** The focus of the Bishops, Priests and Deacons is directed inward toward those in the Church. They baptize, pray for, bless and bring Christ to all in the Church. Through them Christ leads, guides and builds up the Church. For this reason, it is its own Sacrament: for Christ has called leaders and through this Sacrament he gives them the Grace to care for his Church.
- G. When the ordained minister is serving officially in his role in the Church, the Church believes that Christ himself is acting. The minister of the sacraments represents Christ in a real way. In the Sacraments, and through the minister, it is Christ, the High Priest, who acts.
- H. Through the ordained ministry, the presence of Christ the head is made manifest in the community of the Church.
- I. The minister represents Christ, but as a human being this doesn't mean that he is perfect. He still may sin, but his sin does not nullify the Sacraments, which are acts of Christ through him.
- J. The Priest has the task of:
1. **Representing Christ to the Church:** Representing Christ, the head of the Church, before the assembly of the faithful. He acts "*in persona Christi.*"
  2. **Acting the in name of the whole Church to God:**
    - a. When presenting to God the prayer of the Church
    - b. And above all, when offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice.
- K. The Prayer and Offering of the whole Church:
1. In Mass, it is Christ who prays and offers himself to God the Father. Christ worships in and through his Church.
  2. The prayer of the Church is inseparable from the prayer of Christ, her head.
  3. We, the Body of Christ (head and members) pray and offer ourselves **through him** (Christ), **in him** and **with him** to the Father.
  4. The priests, represent the head and the laity, the members of Christ.

### III. The Three Degrees of the Sacrament of Holy Orders:

- A. Episcopate (Bishops): Bishops are priests who are chosen to receive the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. They are the visible head of a particular Church or diocese and are responsible before Christ for the pastoral care of the faithful in that diocese. "As successors of the apostles and members of the college of bishops, they share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope, successor of St. Peter" (CCC 1594). Through the Grace of the Holy Spirit, a sacred character is conferred on them so that they take the place of Christ himself in his roles as teacher, shepherd, and priest. Thus the bishop is responsible for teaching, ruling and sanctifying.

- B. Presbyterate (Priests): Priests are co-workers/agents of the bishops in caring for the faithful in the diocese. They form the presbyterium (the community of priests of the diocese) and have as their primary duty the Eucharistic offering, preaching, and shepherding/pastoring the faithful. When ordained, the priests make a promise of obedience to the bishop. The bishop assigns each priest to have responsibility in his name for a parish community or a particular Church office or ministry.
- C. Diaconate (Deacons): Deacons assist bishops and priests in the diocese in serving the People of God. “Deacons share in Christ's mission and grace in a special way. The sacrament of Holy Orders marks them” with a permanent imprint ("character") which configures them to Christ, who was a "deacon" or servant of all (cf CCC 1596). It confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word (preaching the homily at Mass), “in the distribution of Holy Communion, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in presiding over funerals and in various ministries of charity” (cf CCC 1596). Deacons can be married and have a family. This ministry, which began early on (Acts 6) was restored after Vatican II. However, the Eastern Church has always maintained this important ministry.

#### IV. The Celebration of this Sacrament:

- A. Holy Orders takes place during the Mass in the Cathedral of the diocese, is conferred by the bishop through the laying on of hands, followed by a solemn prayer of consecration. The prayer is that the Holy Spirit might pour out on the candidate the gifts needed for their particular ministry.
- B. There are Special Rites Associated with each particular Ordination (cf CCC 1574):
1. **All three share the initial Rites:** These show that that the election of the candidate is consistent with the practice of the Church and prepare for the solemn act of consecration:
    - a. Presentation and election of the candidate
    - b. Instruction by the bishop
    - c. Examination of the candidate
    - d. Litany of the saints
    - e. An anointing with holy chrism: A sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit who makes their ministry fruitful.
  2. **For a bishop these Rites follow:**
    - a. Giving the book of the Gospels, the ring, the miter, and the crozier to the bishop: The sign of his apostolic mission to proclaim the Word of God, of his fidelity to the Church, the bride of Christ, and his office as shepherd of the Lord's flock.
  3. **For a priest these Rites follow:**
    - a. Presentation to the priest of the paten and chalice: "the offering of the holy people" which he is called to present to God.

#### 4. For a deacon these Rites follow:

- a. Giving the book of the Gospels to the deacon who has just received the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

#### V. Who Can Confer This Sacrament?:

- A. This is a sacrament of the apostolic ministry and the Bishops are the successors of the Apostles. Thus, they are the only ones who can confer this sacrament.
- B. These Bishops have to be validly ordained. This means that they need to be in the line of apostolic succession in order to hand on the “gift of the Spirit, the apostolic line” (cf CCC 1576).

#### VI. Who Can Receive This Sacrament?:

- A. The Church recognizes the sacrament as reserved for baptized men, following the Lord's chosen pattern of choosing 12 apostles. The experience, knowledge and authority that Jesus gave the 12 apostles continue to be present through the Bishops to whom all of this has been handed down in an unbroken chain of succession.
- B. No one chooses ordination for himself. God has to call the individual and the Church has to accept them.
  1. **The Personal Call:** The person senses a call from God to the vocation of Holy Orders
  2. **The Process of the Church's Acceptance:** This call is tested by being lived out in a Catholic Seminary for 4 plus years. In the seminary the candidate is given spiritual and theological training and formation. The next step is being ordained to the Transitional Diaconate for a year in which the candidate works in an actual parish. After this year, if the Church accepts the candidate, then he is ordained to the Priesthood.
- C. Celibacy: In the Roman Catholic Church, priests are to remain unmarried.
  1. **The Gift of Celibacy** is granted by God & those who choose it, do so for the sake of:
    - a. Love: Having an undivided heart--to Love God alone.
    - b. The Kingdom of God: Being freer to build God's Kingdom wherever God may lead.
  2. **Women/Married Priests:**
    - a. The Church will never have women priests—because of Jesus' example—and the Sacramental system of the priest representing Christ the head of the Church.
    - b. But, the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church could have married priests in the future because celibacy is not linked to the theology of priesthood, but is only a practice of the Church.
    - c. The Eastern Rite Catholic Churches have married priests.

- d. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Celibacy has been always held in high esteem. Priests and deacons are allowed to marry. But Bishops are taken only from the priests that are celibate.

## VII. The Effects of the Sacrament:

### A. The Indelible Character:

1. A permanent, sacramental character or seal is imprinted on the soul (as also happens in Baptism), which configures the recipient to Christ in a unique way in his office as priest, prophet and king.
2. For grave reasons, a priest could have his faculties taken away and be prevented from celebrating the Eucharist or serving as a priest. But, in his character he retains his identity as priest and thus does not become a lay person. His priestly character is retained also if he chooses to leave the priesthood and get married by doing it properly through the Church.
3. A sinful priest does not affect the sacraments he performs. This is because it is Christ himself that works through him in the Sacrament. The sacrament is not dependent on the holiness of the minister.

### B. The Graces of the Holy Spirit: The sacrament equips the ordained with the necessary graces to serve and lead the Church, to preach the Gospel, and to sanctify the People of God.

#### 1. Graces given to the Bishop:

- a. A grace of strength to govern the people in the Church.
- b. “The grace to guide and defend his Church with strength and prudence as a father and pastor, with gratuitous love for all and a preferential love for the poor, the sick, and the needy” (CCC 1586).
- c. “The grace to proclaim the Gospel to all, to be the model for his flock, to go before it on the way of sanctification by identifying himself in the Eucharist with Christ the priest and victim, not fearing to give his life for his sheep” (CCC 1586).

#### 2. Graces given to the Priest (from the Byzantine Liturgy):

- a. To be worthy to stand without reproach before your altar.
- b. To proclaim the Gospel of your kingdom.
- c. To fulfill the ministry of your word of truth.
- d. To offer you spiritual gifts and sacrifices.
- e. To renew your people by the bath of rebirth.

#### 3. Graces given to the Deacon:

- a. Strength to be “dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service (*diakonia*) of the liturgy, of the Gospel, and of works of charity" (CCC 1588; Lumen Gentium, 29).