

## The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1536

Like Marriage, the Sacrament of Orders is sometimes called a “Sacrament of Commitment.” A Sacrament is a visible sign of God’s presence, God’s activity in our lives, in the Church and in our world. But it goes beyond that! Sacraments not only show us what God is like and what God dreams for us; Sacraments also make that happen!

In today’s Church, there are actually three degrees of “orders.” These are:

- Diaconate (the Order of Deacons). Deacons may be either Permanent (ordained to service as a deacon for life) or Transitional (ordained to service as a deacon as a step on the path to priesthood).
- Presbyterate (the Order of Priests)
- Episcopate (the Order of Bishops)

So, what does the Sacrament of Orders say to us about the God we believe in? Three things jump readily to mind.

- God has a dream for humanity that includes the full, conscious and active participation of all as priests, prophets and kings.
- God desires that the Church may always continue to be fed by the Eucharist.
- God provides for this nourishment through the ministry of priests.

Ordination, or the reception of Orders, is a religious and liturgical act that can be thought of as a consecration, a blessing or a sacrament. Today the word "ordination" is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons, and goes beyond a simple election, designation, delegation, or institution by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a "sacred power" (sacra potestas) which can come only from Christ himself through his Church. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1538)

Ordination involves the laying on of hands by the bishop, along with a prayer of consecration. These constitute the visible signs of ordination.

The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the "common priesthood of the faithful." Based on this common priesthood and ordered to its service, there exists another participation in the mission of Christ: the ministry conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders, where the task is to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1591)

The ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching (munus docendi), divine worship (munus liturgicum) and pastoral governance (munus regendi). (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1592)

To find out more about this great gift of God and explore whether you might be called to servant leadership as a priest, contact:

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