

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- The three orders in the sacrament of holy orders are bishop, priest, deacon.
- The roots of this sacrament are in the acts of Jesus and the early Church.
- Laying on of hands with a prayer of consecration is the essential sign of holy orders.

## The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Archbishop Oscar Romero's homilies defending the rights of the poor were broadcast by radio. On March 23, 1980, people throughout El Salvador heard him condemn the military's repressive actions against the poor. The next morning, an assassin killed Archbishop Romero as he celebrated Mass.

A prisoner had escaped from a concentration camp in Auschwitz. In retaliation, the Nazi commandant chose ten other prisoners to be starved to death. One of the men chosen sobbed, "My wife, my children!" Fr. Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward, saying, "I want to die in place of this prisoner." His request was granted.

As the early Church grew, the apostles needed assistants and chose seven men "filled with the Spirit and wisdom" to help them minister to the people. Among these first deacons was Stephen, who was stoned to death for refusing to stop preaching the word of God (see Acts 6–7).

These men are powerful examples of living servants of Christ and the Church. Through baptism, God calls all of us to lives of humble service and sacrifice. Some men are called to serve the Church as ordained ministers.

## The Common Priesthood

All the baptized share in the priesthood of Christ. God calls us to "consecrate the world itself to God" in the **common priesthood** of the faithful. Through our good works, prayers, occupations, recreation, and hardships, we both serve others and lead them to Christ" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 34).

*"Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

1 Peter 2:5

*"The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, share in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, self-denial and active charity."*

*Lumen Gentium 10*

- How does my life give praise and honor to God?



## Ordained to Serve

Every community or organization needs leaders—including the Church. In Old Testament times, God designated the tribe of Levi for liturgical services. Their role was “to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (CCC 1539).

The sacrament of holy orders establishes bishops, priests, and deacons as official Church leaders. Through this sacrament, men are ordained “to serve in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community” (CCC 1591).

Holy orders “confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching, divine worship and pastoral governance” (CCC 1592). For example, ordained ministers teach by preaching, living as examples of faith, and providing for faith formation. They practice divine worship by administering sacraments and leading blessings and prayers. They govern through diocesan or parish administration.

Read these passages from the Letter to the Hebrews. They teach us about Christ as the true priest:

Hebrews 4:14–16      Hebrews 5:1–4, 10

Hebrews 7:23–28      Hebrews 10:11–14

- From these passages, what do you understand of the priest’s role?
- What characteristics are shared by the ordained and common priesthood?



## Instituted By Christ

The priesthood became perfected in Christ, who sacrificed himself once for all time. Knowing his time on earth was limited, Jesus sent out his apostles to preach and baptize (see Matthew 10) and gave them the power to heal and forgive sins (see Mark 6:1–3; John 20:23). At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his apostles the power to celebrate the Eucharist. The Twelve served the Church as the first bishops.

## Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands by the bishop, with a prayer of consecration, is the essential rite in the sacrament of holy orders. In the prayer, the bishop asks “God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts proper to the ministry to which the candidate is being ordained” (CCC 1573). Ordination “confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a ‘sacred power’ which can come only from Christ himself through his Church” (CCC 1538).

Some additional rites include an anointing with chrism (bishop and priest), presentation of ring, **miter**, and **crozier** (bishop), giving the *Book of the Gospels* (bishop, priest, deacon), and presentation of **paten** and **chalice** (priest).

*“Set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you...with the imposition of hands.”*

1 Timothy 4:12–14

- In what other sacraments is the laying on of hands a sign? How is it used in each?



## Leading the Early Church

As the Church spread and grew, those blessed with strong faith and the ability to preach and teach became leaders. Their position was set apart by the laying on of hands and the calling down of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:6–7). This marked the beginning of formal **ordination**, the sacramental act that integrates a man into the order of bishops, priests, or deacons, making him an official minister. While everyone could proclaim the word and witness to the faith through the common priesthood, only those in the *ordained priesthood* had the power to preach in the assembly, celebrate the Eucharist, and guide the faith community.

This tradition continues today in the sacrament of holy orders. The bishops, successors of the apostles, confer (hand or pass on) orders to other men who then become bishops, priests, and deacons.

*“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.”*

CCC 1536

## What Are the Degrees of Holy Orders?

### Bishop

The office of bishop is traced to Christ’s commissioning the apostles as the first leaders of the faithful. Bishops lead the local Church as Christ’s representatives. Each bishop ensures the unity of his local Church with the universal Church.

As the principal teacher in his diocese, the bishop sees that the truths of the Catholic faith and the principles of morality are taught correctly. As first among preachers, he speaks in the name of Christ. When he visits a parish or celebrates a sacrament, he represents the universal Church. Our principal bishop is the pope, the bishop of Rome. A bishop can officiate at all seven sacraments.

### Priest

In the early Church, the bishops ministered to everyone. As the number of believers grew, the bishops were no longer able to care for all of them. Therefore, they ordained men to act in their place. These men were the first priests.

A priest is ordained to serve in the name of the bishop and called to preach by word and action. He is the leader of worship and a sign of Christ’s presence among the people. He is to take on the image of the Good Shepherd and guide his flock.

Priests can celebrate the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, penance, and anointing of the sick, and can be the official witness at weddings. He may celebrate confirmation with the bishop’s permission.

### Deacon

The word *deacon* comes from the Greek for “servant” or “helper.” Deacons are ordained for the threefold service “of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God” (LG 29). Deacons may proclaim the word by reading the Gospel and preaching the homily at Mass. They may assist the celebrant at Mass, distribute the Eucharist, perform baptisms, officiate at weddings and funeral services, lead prayer, preach, and teach. The focus of the deacon’s ministry is charity: caring for the community, especially those in need.

There are two types of deacons. The transitional diaconate is the step before ordination as a priest. A single or married man may be ordained as a permanent deacon. If a permanent deacon is single or if his wife dies, he must remain unmarried.

*“In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth.”*

CCC 1548

- What are some characteristics of a good leader?
- Which of these traits do you think are most important in an ordained minister? Why?



## Why Celibacy?

Celibacy is the voluntary state of not marrying and of abstaining from sexual relations. Christ himself was celibate. He spoke of those who chose to remain unmarried "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12). Paul praised celibacy as a means of focusing on "the affairs of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:32–34).

Women and men religious (sisters, priests, brothers) take vows of celibacy because they wish to serve God wholeheartedly. Celibacy offers a unique opportunity to imitate Jesus.

*"There is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age...and eternal life in the age to come."*

Mark 10:29–30

- How are the priests and deacons I know leading me closer to Christ?



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