

Holy Orders

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. ~ 2 Corinthians 6:3-11

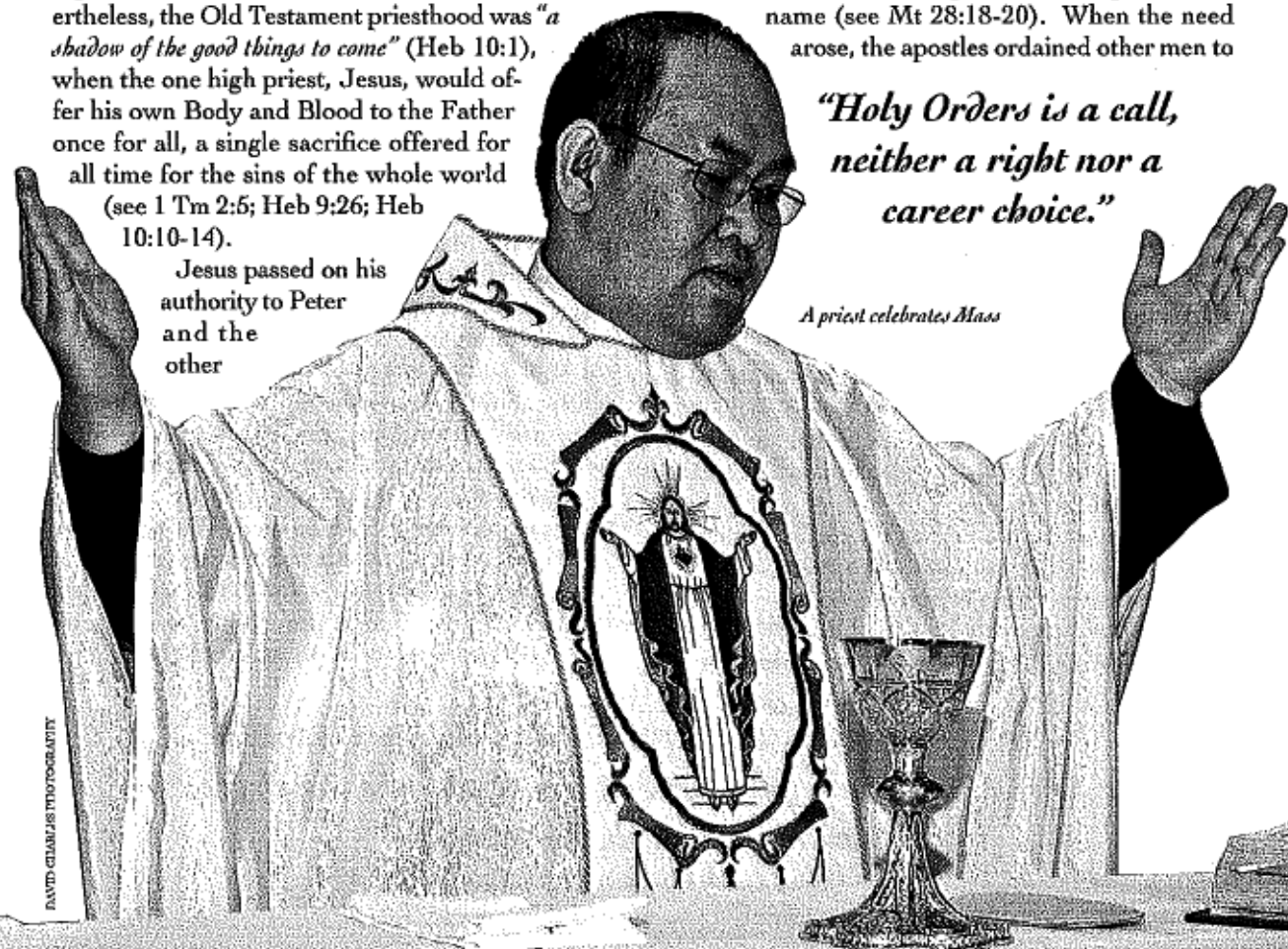
THE OLD TESTAMENT priests were messengers of the Lord (see Mal 2:7), "appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb 5:1), but their offerings could never "take away sins" (Heb 10:4). Nevertheless, the Old Testament priesthood was "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1), when the one high priest, Jesus, would offer his own Body and Blood to the Father once for all, a single sacrifice offered for all time for the sins of the whole world (see 1 Tm 2:5; Heb 9:26; Heb 10:10-14).

Jesus passed on his authority to Peter and the other

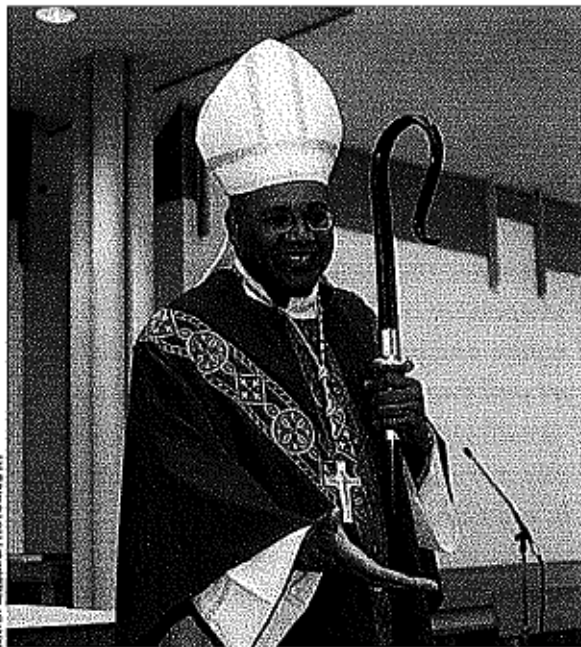
apostles by giving Peter the "keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 16:19) by making them priests at the Last Supper when he commanded "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19), and by sending them out "to all the nations" to preach and baptize in his name (see Mt 28:18-20). When the need arose, the apostles ordained other men to

"Holy Orders is a call, neither a right nor a career choice."

A priest celebrates Mass



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A bishop greets parishioners at the end of Mass.

be their successors (see Acts 1:20-26; Acts 6:1-6), and likewise, their successors ordained others to follow after them (see 1 Tm 3:1-13; 2 Tm 1:6; Ti 1:5).

Three Degrees of Holy Orders

Holy Orders is a call, neither a right nor a career choice. Unlike the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist) to which God calls everyone, the call to receive Holy Orders is placed in the hearts of only some. In the Latin Rite, the priesthood is also a call to be celibate (unmarried) *“for the sake of the Kingdom”* (Mt 19:12). This celibacy helps those called to be more completely devoted to *“the affairs of the Lord”* (1 Cor 7:32), particularly with regard to their role as *“father”* to the family of God, the Church (see handout on Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom).

As soon as the need arose, the early Church conferred (gave) and exercised the sacrament of Holy Orders in three different degrees: bishop, priest, and deacon (see Acts 6:1-6; Phil 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1-2; Ti 1:7). Bishops receive the fullest degree of Holy Orders

and can trace their ordination in apostolic succession back to the apostles. Timothy, whom Paul calls his son (see 1 Tm 1:2; 2 Tm 2:1), was commissioned by Paul to stay in Ephesus and become its first bishop (see 1 Tm 1:3). Scripture makes it plain that Timothy’s authority was conferred by Paul through the laying on of his hands (see 2 Tm 1:6). And already in the second century, the importance of apostolic succession for the preservation and purity of the Church’s doctrine is demonstrated by St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, France who lists the unbroken chain of succession in Rome from St. Peter down to the pope of his day.

In Holy Orders, the bishop receives the offices of Jesus for sanctifying, teaching, and guiding (or governing) the faithful as priest, prophet, and king. Most bishops are also assigned by the pope to serve a certain portion of the Church called a diocese or archdiocese. Bishops also share in the pope’s responsibility for the whole Church as brother bishops.

Priests are also ordained into Jesus’ ministerial priesthood, but to a lesser degree than that of the bishop (episcopate). Normally, priests are ordained by the bishop of the diocese they will be serving in or the religious order of which they will be a part. They are to be the bishop’s co-workers, and when they are ordained, they make a promise of obedience to him. Priests may be given responsibility for any of a bishop’s works or for parishes under his authority. As priests, they are given the power to forgive sin and to offer the Mass.

Deacons are ordained by the bishop *“not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry”*¹ (CCC 1569). This ministry and service of a deacon enables the bishops and priests to focus on the specific duties of the ministerial priesthood (see Acts 6:1-6). Deacons assist at the Mass, preach and teach, witness and bless marriages, preside at funerals, baptize and carry out significant works of charity. Although they are not members of the ministerial priesthood, through their call and ordination to service they constitute the diaconate, that is, the third degree of Holy Orders, and assist in the sanctifying, teaching, and shepherding functions of priests and bishops.

“In Holy Orders, the baptized man becomes ‘another Christ.’ He is changed not because of what he can do, but because of what he has become.”

¹ *Lumen Gentium* 29; cf. *Christus Dominus* 16

Rite of Holy Orders

Bishops administer the sacrament of Holy Orders. The essential rite of Holy Orders is the laying on of hands by the bishop in silence followed by the prayer of consecration proper to each degree of ordination (see Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6).

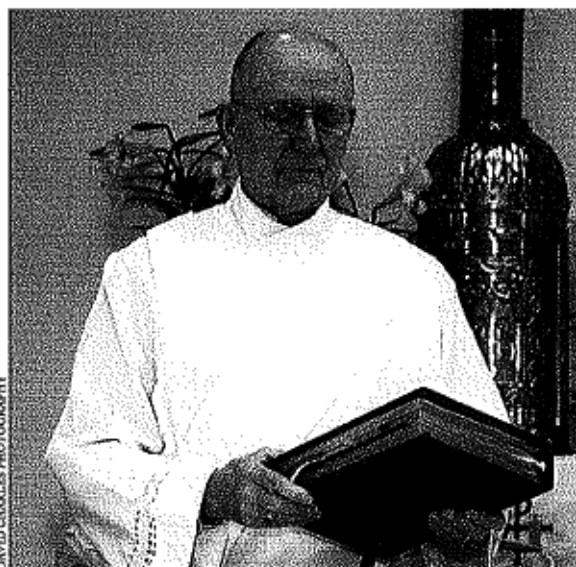
The prayer of consecration for a bishop reads, in part: "So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name" (*Rites of Ordination* 26). A bishop serves his diocese as its chief shepherd and pastor. At his ordination, the newly ordained bishop is presented with a gold ring, a tall pointed hat called a miter, and a pastoral staff, all symbols of his new role as chief shepherd and pastor.

The prayer of consecration for a priest reads, in part: "Almighty Father, grant to this servant of yours the dignity of the priesthood. Renew within him the Spirit of holiness. As a co-worker with the order of bishops may he be faithful to the ministry that he receives from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct" (*Rites of Ordination* 22). To symbolize the ministry he will perform at the altar, the newly ordained priest is presented with a chalice and dressed in a priestly garment called a chasuble (a long, sleeveless overgarment worn by priests when celebrating the Mass).

The prayer of consecration for a deacon reads, in part: "Lord, look with favor on this servant of yours, whom we now dedicate to the office of deacon, to minister at your holy altar. Lord, send forth upon him the Holy Spirit, that he may be strengthened by the gift of your sevenfold grace to carry out faithfully the work of the ministry" (*Rites of Ordination* 21). Because of his proper ministry to the Word, the newly ordained deacon is presented with the book of the Gospels. He also receives special garments that he will wear when assisting at Mass and presiding over other liturgical ceremonies.

What are the Effects of Holy Orders?

In Holy Orders, the baptized man is configured to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit. He becomes "another Christ." In the most profound way possible, ordination creates a new man, one who, if living his vocation faithfully, can say with St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). He is changed not because of what he can do, but because of what he has become. This grace



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*A deacon preparing the Sacramentary
(also called the Roman Missal) for Mass*

makes a permanent seal or spiritual character on his soul that conforms him in a deeper way to Christ and enables him to act *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ") by carrying out the threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. Like Baptism and Confirmation, the effect of this sacrament is permanent and therefore cannot be repeated or given temporarily.

Also, the Holy Spirit gives specific sacramental graces to each recipient according to the office to which he is being ordained. Bishops receive specific graces that help them guide and defend the Church as shepherds and pastors of God's people. Priests receive those graces that are proper to the duties of their office, among which are principally the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel, to baptize, to offer the Mass, and to forgive sins. And deacons, who have been ordained to service, receive graces to help them carrying out their service toward the liturgy, the Gospel, and works of charity. While the sacramental graces differ, all three offices of bishop, priest, and deacon constitute the hierarchical ministry of the Church that is directed toward worship of God and the teaching, pastoring, and governing of his people.

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt 5:1-4).

(CCC 858-862, 1534-1589, 2686)

In Persona Christi: The Concept Explained

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ~ John 15:16

THE PHRASE "IN PERSONA CHRISTI" is not one that is commonly understood. Apart from being a Latin phrase which is seldom translated, further confusion results from wrong ideas about the nature and meaning of the priesthood. However, when understood correctly, it makes clear the essential difference between the baptismal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood and provides one of the fundamental truths needed to understand the sacraments of the

"Bishops and priests are given the power to act, in the person of Christ, when they exercise their sanctifying, teaching, and guiding functions for the sake of the members of the Body, the Church."

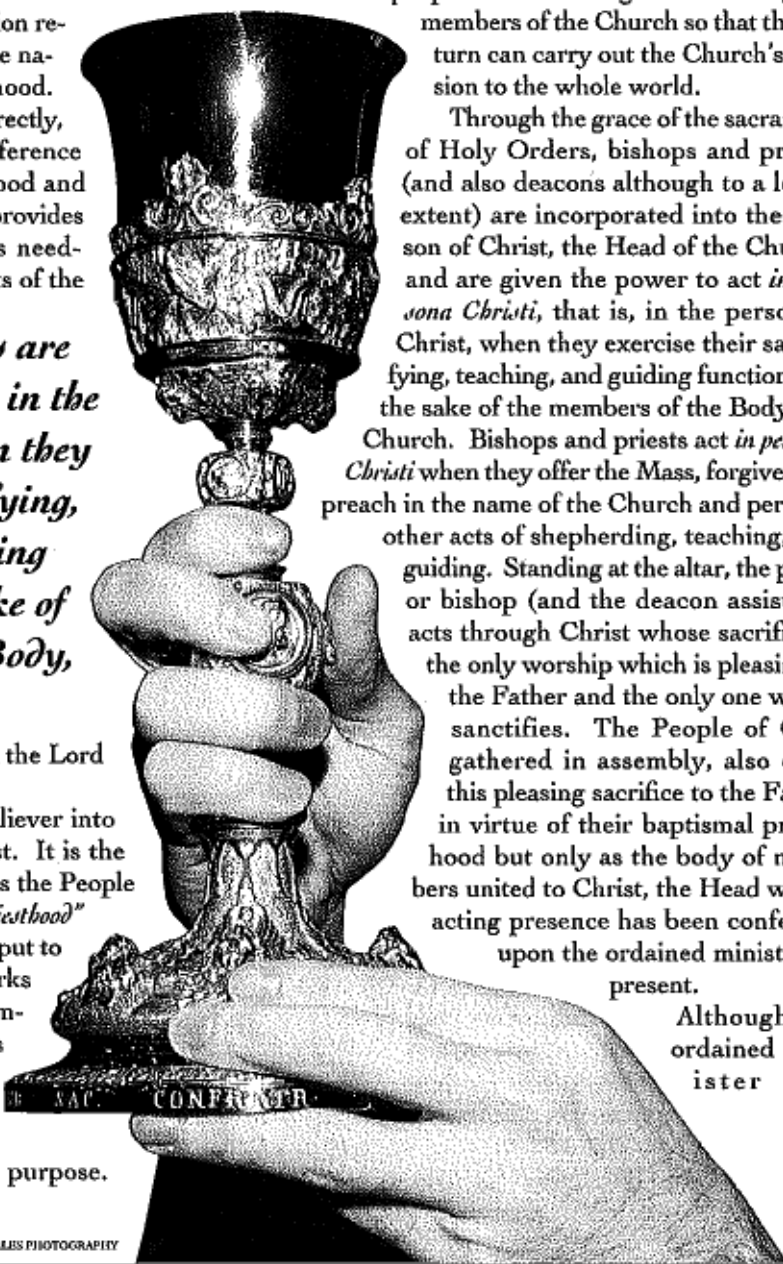
Church as real encounters with the Lord Jesus himself.

Baptism incorporates the believer into the eternal priesthood of Christ. It is the means by which the Lord makes the People of God into a "body" and "royal priesthood" (1 Pt 2:5, 9). This priesthood is put to the service of humanity and works to draw all people back into communion with God. It receives its sustaining power and grace from Christ through the ministerial priesthood that he has created in the Church for this purpose.

The ministerial priesthood is made up of bishops and priests who, assisted by deacons, are given the specific purpose of sustaining and renewing the members of the Church so that they in turn can carry out the Church's mission to the whole world.

Through the grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops and priests (and also deacons although to a lesser extent) are incorporated into the person of Christ, the Head of the Church, and are given the power to act *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ, when they exercise their sanctifying, teaching, and guiding functions for the sake of the members of the Body, the Church. Bishops and priests act *in persona Christi* when they offer the Mass, forgive sins, preach in the name of the Church and perform other acts of shepherding, teaching, and guiding. Standing at the altar, the priest or bishop (and the deacon assisting) acts through Christ whose sacrifice is the only worship which is pleasing to the Father and the only one which sanctifies. The People of God, gathered in assembly, also offer this pleasing sacrifice to the Father in virtue of their baptismal priesthood but only as the body of members united to Christ, the Head whose acting presence has been conferred upon the ordained minister(s) present.

Although the ordained minister has



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been configured to Christ and his being permanently made to image him as Head, his ability to act *in persona Christi* extends only to those functions given to him by Christ. A priest who takes a plane to go on vacation for a week is not acting *in persona Christi*. However, this does not mean that he takes a vacation from *being* a priest but underscores the primacy of his priestly actions from his other more mundane ones (for example, driving a car, taking a plane, eating a meal, etc.).

The presence of Christ in the priest does not erase his human frailty. Like the rest of the baptized, he must struggle with human weakness and sin, a struggle characteristic of all the members of the Church, including its ministers. However, the minister's sins or errors cannot impede the validity and fruitfulness of the sacraments because these acts which are proper to his ordained function are guaranteed by the presence of Christ in whose name he acts. Thus, the sacraments are efficacious — that is, they give the grace they signify — because the true minister is always Christ. The sacraments act *ex opere operato* (Latin for "by the very fact of the action's being performed"). The sacraments are effective *even if the minister of the sacrament is utterly depraved and mired in sin*. The righteousness of the minister does not give the sacraments their power; God does. This is a phenomenal example of God's mercy and loving-kindness toward his people.

For our part, we should offer respect and love to our bishops and priests, as St. Paul instructs us: "*But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work*" (1 Thes 5:12-13). We should pray daily for our Holy Father and our bishops, priests, and deacons, even, and especially, for those who sin, that they may be "*conformed to the image of Christ*" (Rom 8:29).

(CCC 1127-1128, 1548-1553, 1585)



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Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ~ John 15:13

CHRIST CALLS ALL to holiness — to the perfection of charity. Some are called to the public profession of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a society or permanent state of life approved by the Church.

The religious — one who lives in a religious community — chooses to live a life totally dedicated to God, focused primarily on the attainment of glory in the world to come.

Ordained priests and bishops of the Church in the Latin Rite are men who have vowed to remain celibate (unmarried, and therefore abstaining completely from sexual relations) for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Bishops of other rites are chosen from unmarried priests, and those who are ordained to the priesthood before marriage may not marry.)

Celibate men give themselves solely to God, to serve his people with an undivided heart. Celibacy is embraced not because marriage is not desired, but because the work of God is more greatly desired. *"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife"* (1

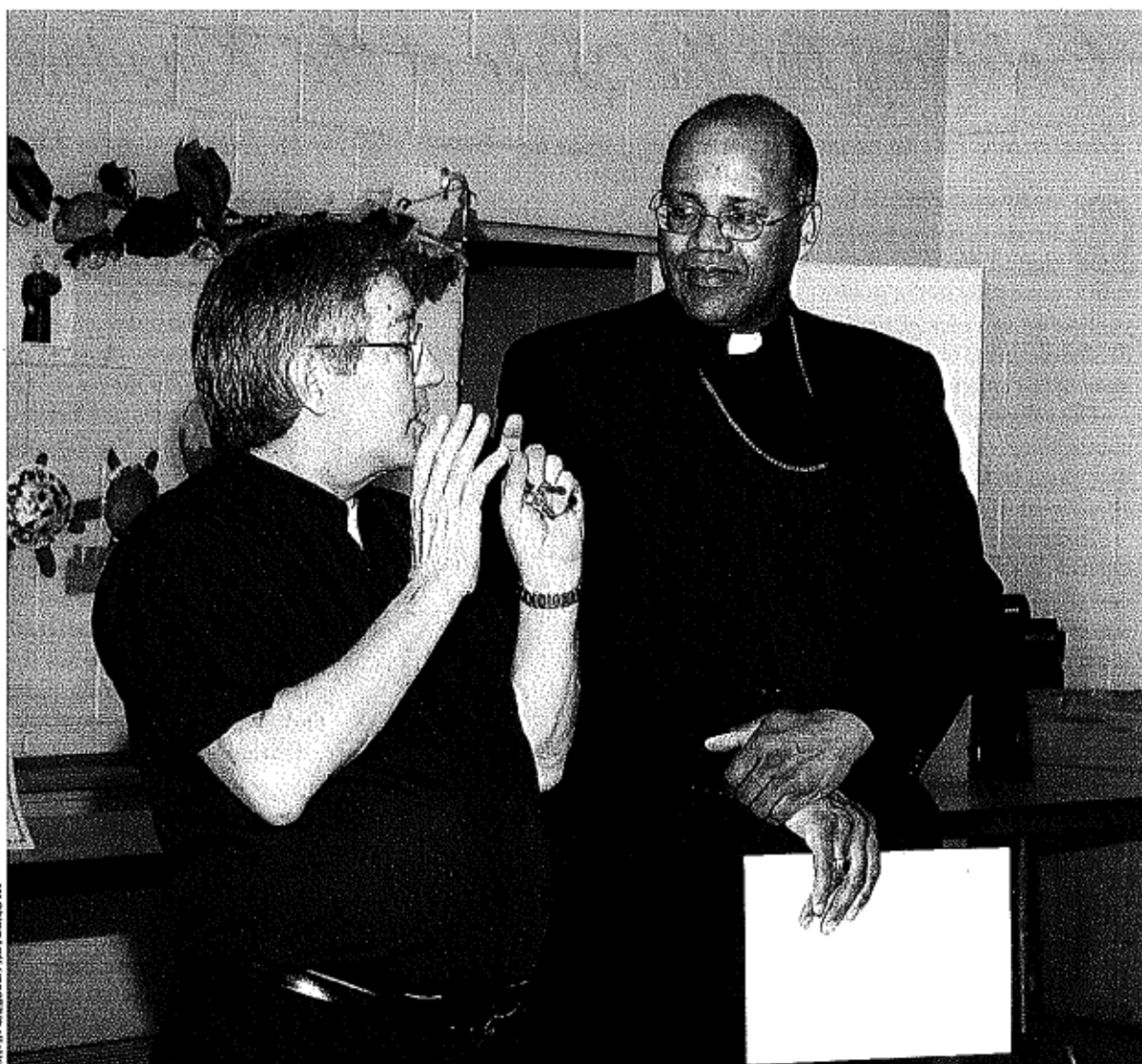
A sister of the Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary (LSJM), founded in Baltimore, Maryland in 1974

Celibacy is a self-surrender for a sublime purpose.

Cor 7:32-33). Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke favorably of those who voluntarily choose celibacy: *"there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it"* (Mt 19:12). These words of Christ are the foundation for the Church's rule of celibacy for priests.

The Church teaches that both virginity for the sake of the Kingdom and Christian marriage are gifts from the Lord. Both are esteemed by the Church, and the realities they signify are inseparably united and caught up in the mystery of Christ. Periodically, sexual scandals have brought into question the desirability of celibacy, or even whether it is healthy and normal to forego marriage and sexual relations for a lifetime. These scandals bring to light a grievous misunderstanding of the intent of Jesus Christ to encourage heroic souls to dedicate themselves to his total, unfettered service, so that his work on earth could be accomplished more effectively. Christ intentionally spoke favor-





DAVID CLUGES PHOTOGRAPHY

A pastor and bishop

ably of those who would choose to "be eunuchs" for his sake because their undivided service was desired by him. Christ's words clearly show that he did not think celibacy was unnatural or beyond the ability of men to maintain, with God's grace. Christ was emphatic in stressing that intense, all-consuming love for, and service to, him were paramount. He calls his special servants to be supernatural rather than merely natural when he says: "*He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Mt 10:37; see also Mt 19:29). To question Christ's call for a life dedicated to him in celibacy is to open one's self to the warning call of Christ: "*O men of little faith!*" (Lk 12:28). The words of Christ in the Gospels and the experience of the Church since apostolic times speak

of the fruitfulness of the celibate priesthood and the awesome example of men living a life and ministry in imitation of the celibate Christ.

Celibacy has meaning, power, and purpose primarily because of the apostolate. It is a self-surrender for a sublime purpose. The purpose of celibacy, like all forms of asceticism (self-denial for spiritual reasons), is for love, and love alone. To lay down one's life for his friends (see Jn 15:13) can not only mean the kind of physical death that Jesus voluntarily accepted on the cross, but also the day-by-day death of one's own desires and will for the sake of others. This is the call of the celibate priest, part of the mystery of his vocation to ministerial service and a glorious gift to God's people.

(CCC 915-916; 1579-1580, 1618-1620)

Women and the Priesthood

Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." ~ Matthew 9:15



The choosing of the twelve Apostles, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

WOMEN HAVE GAINED increased equality with men in our contemporary world. Legislation has been passed and amended and tested in the courts to promote equality of opportunity in the workplace, schools, and marital rights. This trend toward equality is supported by the Church and most other Christian communions. Many of these communions have chosen to open their all-male ministries to women in an effort to extend the equality achieved in society into clerical ministry.

The Church continues to adhere to its practice of a male-only clergy as a norm received and established by Christ when he instituted the priesthood. Jesus chose only men to be his apostles and, as the *Catechism* explains, "[t]he Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible"¹ (CCC 1577). This is the teaching of the Church, established as a definitive and irreformable (unchangeable) teaching by the supreme authority of Pope John Paul II in his 1994 letter *On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*.

The question of why women cannot be priests can only be answered and understood in light of the truth that Christ reveals concerning himself and his plan for the Church. Far from being bound by the norms of his culture, Jesus called both men and women to be his disciples (see Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3; Lk 24:9-10; Jn 20:17-18; Acts 1:14) and ignored Jewish customs that separated men and women (see Mt 26:6-13; Lk 7:36-50; Lk 13:11-13; Jn 4:5-29). It is thus simply false to believe that, in choosing only men as his apostles, Jesus succumbed to societal pressures of his day that discriminated against women. In fact, our Lord chose a woman to receive the highest honor and dignity of humanity when he chose Mary to be the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church. Yet he did not include her or any of the other women disciples in the priesthood, even though all the disciples "*forsook him and fled*" (Mt 26:56) when Jesus was arrested, while his Mother and the faithful women followed him to the foot of the cross (see Jn 19:25). This exclusion cannot, therefore, mean that women are of lesser dignity but instead must flow from the God-willed differences between men and women (see also handout on *The Dignity and Vocation of Women*) and the nature and meaning of the priesthood.

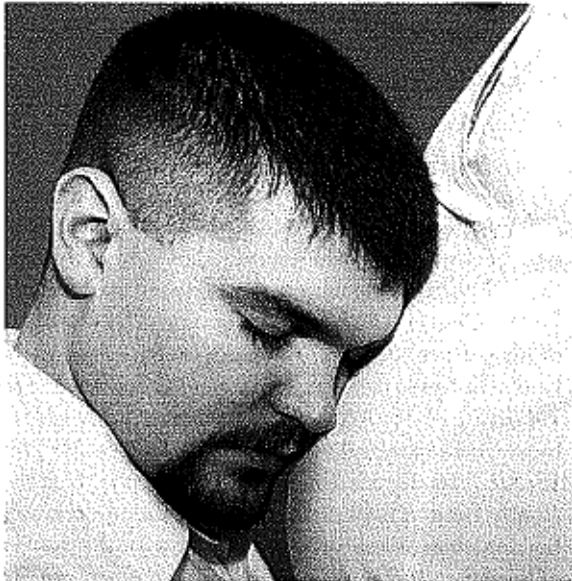
God the Father willed that his Son be incarnated as a man and not as a woman. A spousal relationship between God and his people is a theme of the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah tells us:

"For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called" (Is 54:5). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God says that he will renew his covenantal relationship with his people: "*Behold, the*

"The male symbolism of the bridegroom is central for understanding the priesthood."

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 26-27; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declaration, *Inter insigniores* from *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 69 (1977) 98-116.

"Equality before the Lord is not sameness."



DAVID GEORGE FOR SOCIETY

days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband" (Jer 31:31-32). Jeremiah had also reproached the Israelites for their repeated breaking of their covenant with God in marital terms: "Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the Lord" (Jer 3:20).

The entire book of the prophet Hosea is an extended parable on the marriage between God and his people and the faithless behavior of the Israelites. In a passage of surpassing beauty and tenderness, God says: *"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal' [that is, a master to a slave woman].... And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:14-16, 19-20).*

The same kind of imagery pervades the New Testament. Jesus works his first miracle, changing water into a superabundance of the finest wine, at a marriage feast (see Jn 2:1-11). He compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a marriage feast (see Mt 22:2). He calls himself the "bridegroom" (see Mk 2:19-20; see also

Jn 3:29, where John the Baptist says this). St. Paul tells us that the mystery of Matrimony *"refers to Christ and the church"* (Eph 5:32), and that the relationship between Christ and his Church is as completely intimate as a marriage: *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor; without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"* (Eph 5:25-27). In the final scenes in the book of Revelation, the consummation of the marriage of Christ and his Church is announced: *"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure.... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb"* (Rv 19:7-9).

The male symbolism of the bridegroom is central for understanding the priesthood, especially in its specific character of service that is fully expressed and revealed in the celebration of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christ the Bridegroom gives himself up to the Father as an act of redeeming love for his Bride the Church. This action is a joint offering of the Church as the body of members joined to her Head who is Christ, represented by the priest. The representation of Christ in the priest acting *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ") is clear only when it is a man whose masculinity images Christ, the Bridegroom.

From the very beginning of the Church, men and women were both baptized (see Acts 8:12). Men and women are equal in their baptismal dignity: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28). But equality before the Lord is not sameness. Equality does not take away the distinctiveness of the God-given roles of men and women in both creation and redemption. The role of women is as essential to the Church's mission and holiness as is its priestly ministry.

Finally, holiness is the goal of Christian living. The Church holds up Mary as its example *par excellence* for men and women alike to imitate. *The greatest in the Church, the true expression of its power, are not the ordained ministers but its saints, on earth and in Heaven, whose lives are transformed in their service of charity expressed toward God and others so that they become "other Christs" not merely in a ministerial capacity but as true icons — images — of their Savior.*

(CCC 1577-1578)