

LESSON 36: HOLY ORDERS (INTRODUCTION)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 10
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 13

Revision from previous lesson:

We are still learning about the Sacraments of the Church. We have so far covered the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and the Sacrament of the Eucharist (which is also related very much to the Mass). In these next several lessons, we will discuss the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Current lesson:

1. Men who are called to the public ministry of the Church undergo a process called “ordination”.
2. The bishop is the minister of the Holy Orders, and only he can ordain a deacon or a priest or another bishop through the imposition of hands.

CCC 1538: “Integration into one of these bodies in the Church was accomplished by a rite called *ordinatio*, a religious and liturgical act which was 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. Ordination is also called *consecratio*, for it is a setting apart and an investiture by Christ himself for his Church. The laying on of hands by the bishop, with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination.”

3. Priests and deacons who are ordained share in the ministry of the bishop in varying degrees.
4. The purpose of the Holy Orders is to teach, to govern, and to sanctify the Church.
5. Ordination leaves an indelible mark on the recipient of this Sacrament.
6. Sacred Scripture shows a pattern of the Apostles ordaining ministers of the Church through the imposition of hands, and the Holy Catholic Church has preserved this Sacred Tradition in unbroken succession:

1 Timothy 4:14: “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the *imposition of hands* of the presbyterate.”

2 Timothy 1:6: “For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the *imposition of my hands*.”

7. There is only one Sacrament but three grades of the Holy Orders:
Bishop
Priest
Deacon
8. St Ignatius of Antioch (2nd century) said, “Without the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church”.
9. Essentially, the entire Church is a priestly people (CCC 1591), which means all Catholics participate in the “common priesthood of the faithful”. But beyond that, there is the “ministerial priesthood” which is made up of men who are called out from among the common priesthood to be conferred a ministry by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. “The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood” (CCC 1547), and “serves in the name and in the person of Christ the Head in the midst of the community” (CCC 1591).
10. These men who are ordained are configured into Christ. This is called an “ontological” change. It is not just about what they do, but more so, who they are (which then determines what they do). Just as Christ is the Groom of the Church, those men called out from among the people to be ordained as ministers of the Church are now also “Christ” for the Church. This is how Christ continues to be present to His Bride even though He is with the Father.
11. For this reason, women are not ordained into the Holy Orders, since there is a necessary maleness to this Sacrament. In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared that “the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church’s faithful”.
12. Being an ordained cleric of the Church does not necessarily make a man more holy than the laity. Like everyone else, a cleric struggles personally towards holiness and perfection. Because the ministry of a cleric requires for him to encounter people and to work with them, the weaknesses of a cleric very often become more visible than those of other people. Such situations are an opportunity for the man to grow in holiness as well as the people to learn to be gracious and patient in allowing their clergy an opportunity to grow.
13. In the past several decades, reports have been abundant from all around the world regarding priests who had been found guilty of sexually abusing children. This act is wrong, and if such a thing ever should occur, a cleric should be reported. However, this should also not cause us to lose faith in the Church, knowing that ministers called by God are also sinners. For every cleric who has been found guilty, there are many other clergy who are living sacrificial and righteous lives.



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