

LESSON 39: HOLY ORDERS (BISHOPS)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 10
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 10
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 14

Revision from previous lesson:

We have learned about deacons and priests in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The highest rank of minister in the Holy Orders is that of the bishop, and we will learn about bishops in this lesson.

Current lesson:

1. The New Testament also reflects a ministry of the highest rank within the three-fold hierarchy, that is the bishop:

1 Timothy 3:1-2: “This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop (*episkopes*) desires a noble task. Therefore, a bishop (*episkopon*) must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self- controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach.”

Titus 1:7, 9: “For a bishop (*episkopon*) as God’s steward must be blameless, ... holding fast to the true message as taught so that he will be able both to exhort with sound doctrine and to refute opponents.”

2. *CCC 1555*: “Amongst those various offices which have been exercised in the Church from the earliest times the chief place, according to the witness of tradition, is held by the function of those who, through their appointment to the dignity and responsibility of bishop, and in virtue consequently of the unbroken succession going back to the beginning, are regarded as transmitters of the apostolic line.”

CCC 1556: “To fulfill their exalted mission, ‘the apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming upon them, and by the imposition of hands they passed on to their auxiliaries the gift of the Spirit, which is transmitted down to our day through episcopal consecration.’”

3. *Lumen Gentium*, 20: “Bishops...with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing. And just as the office granted individually to Peter, the first among the apostles, is permanent and is to be transmitted to his successors, so also the apostles' office of nurturing the Church is permanent, and is to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore, the Sacred Council teaches that bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles, as shepherds of the Church, and he who hears them, hears Christ, and he who rejects them, rejects Christ and Him who sent Christ.”

4. Bishops must always be celibate men, and exception is never possible. This is because he is called into the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, taking upon himself the role of a high priest as a successor of Jesus Christ's original Apostles. In other words, he is fully configured into the person of Jesus Christ, who already has a Bride, that is, the Holy Catholic Church.
5. Why does the New Testament seem to say that bishops can be men who have been married before? This is because during the time of the first generation of Christians, many married men were called to become priests and bishops. It would have been difficult to find celibate men for the priesthood, since by the time they started recognising and following Jesus, they were already married men. Hence, they remained married even as priests and bishops, but those who became bishops were required to live apart from their wives rather than living like normal married couples. And if a man had already been widowed before and married a second wife after that, he would not be ordained as a bishop.
6. A bishop is usually addressed verbally as "Bishop", or in more formal contexts, "Your Lordship" (for bishops) or "Your Grace" (for archbishops). In writing, certain formal salutations apply depending on local custom ("Right Reverend", "Most Reverend", or "Monsignor").
7. In addition to doing everything that a priest does, a bishop also confers the Sacrament of Confirmation. He also ordains other men into the Holy Orders at any level. A person ordained as bishop may or may not be a local ordinary, i.e. the bishop in charge of a territory.
8. In addition to what a priest wears at liturgical celebrations, a bishop also wears a mitre (the tall headgear), holds a crosier (the shepherd's staff), and has his episcopal ring on at all times.
9. Outside of liturgical contexts, Canon Law obliges clerics to be dressed in clerical attire at all times (Canon 284). It is both a right and an obligation. (The local custom in Malaysia has developed such that being dressed in clerical attire is not made compulsory.)
10. In addition to the street clerical attire of other clergy, a bishop wears a pectoral cross, a violet-coloured fascia (a band above his waist), and a violet-coloured zucchetto (skullcap). His cassock also has violet piping.
11. There are only very minor differences between a bishop and an archbishop. Usually, a bishop is given the title "archbishop" by virtue of his appointment to a very significant see, which is called an "archdiocese" (either because of its significant history or geographical locality). This title is honorary in nature and does not give the archbishop a higher rank than the other bishops.
12. An archbishop may also be a bishop of a metropolitan archdiocese, which is surrounded by "less significant" dioceses. An example of this is the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, which is the metropolitan archdiocese for the dioceses of Penang and Malacca Johore. In a case

like this, the dioceses of Penang and Malacca Johore are called suffragan dioceses. Being a metropolitan archbishop does not entail significantly extra powers of governance over the suffragan dioceses.

13. The pope is the Bishop of Rome, and he becomes the pope by virtue of being the Bishop of Rome (who is actually a Successor of Peter, who was the Chief of Apostles). Although other bishops are successors of the bishops before them, a pope is the Successor of Peter and not the successor of the pope before him. The pope is the sign of unity for the universal Church, as he is the supreme and universal Shepherd of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.
14. A cardinal is appointed exclusively by the pope, and is usually given the rank of bishop (although dispensation can be granted by the pope for a priest who declines to be ordained as a bishop when being elevated as a cardinal). The main responsibility of a cardinal is to elect the new pope when the pontiff resigns or dies (only cardinals below 80 years of age are eligible to vote). A cardinal can also be given special responsibilities by the pope. Cardinals are often nicknamed “Princes of the Church”. Their colour is red to signify the martyrdom that they must be willing to shed their blood in defence of the Catholic faith.



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