Holy Orders: Called from the Community

Teacher Background

Holy Orders is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. The sacrament of Holy Orders includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. The word order in the ancient Roman world designated an established civil body, especially a governing body. The Latin word ordinatio (ordination) meant being admitted to and incorporated into an ordo (order). The liturgy of ordination speaks of the ordo episcoporum (order of bishops), ordo presbyterorum (order of priests) and ordo diaconorum (order of deacons) Today the word “ordination” refers to the sacramental act that integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters (priests) or deacons.

The essential rite of the sacrament of Holy Orders for all three degrees consists in: 1. the placing of the hands of the ordaining bishop on the head of the person to be ordained (the ordinand) and 2. The bishop’s specific consecratory prayer petitioning God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit related to the ministry to which the candidate for ordination is being called and ordained. As in all sacraments, additional rites surround the celebration of the sacrament vary greatly among the different liturgical traditions. In the Roman Catholic Latin rite, the following elements make up the liturgy of ordination:

- Presentation and election of the ordinand
- Instruction by the bishop
- Examination of the candidate
- Litany of the saints

The above elements attest that the choice of the candidate is made in keeping with the practice of the Church and prepare for the solemn act of ordination.

There follows:

- an anointing with holy chrism of bishop and priest as a sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit who makes fruitful the priestly and episcopal ministry.
- giving of the book of the Gospels, the ring the mitre and the crozier to the bishop, as the sign of his apostolic mission to proclaim the Word of God, of his fidelity to the Church and his office as shepherd of the Lord’s flock.
- presentation to the priest of the paten and the chalice, a symbol of the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the people of God.
- the giving of the book of the Gospels to the deacon who has just received the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

The sacrament of Holy Orders and the liturgy of ordination are to be seen in the context of the whole Church as a priestly people. Through baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. Based on this “common priesthood of all the faithful” and ordered to its service, there is another participation in the mission of Christ. This is the ministry conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders. The ministerial priesthood differs in its essence from the priesthood of all the faithful, since it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. This service is exercised through teaching, divine worship and pastoral governance.

The bishop receives the fullness of the sacraments of Holy Orders that integrates him into the College of Bishops and makes him the head of the particular Church entrusted to him. As a successor of the apostles and a member of the Episcopal College, a bishop shares in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope.
Priests are united with the bishops in priestly dignity and are called to be the co-workers of the bishop. Priests form a grouping (presbyterium) around their bishop and share with the bishop responsibility for a particular Church community—usually a diocese. Priests receive from the bishop the charge of a particular parish community or other responsibility in the local Church.

Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service in the Church. Deacons do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance and especially the service of charity.