



Sacraments 22/35: Introduction to the Sacrament of Holy Orders

To restart our sacramental theology, which was interrupted over a year ago, the grace of each Sacrament builds on the natural meaning of the ritual action. It does not replace this natural meaning: it makes it supernatural. In Holy Orders, the Natural Meaning is the necessity of having leadership and a spokesman for a group. In Church history, it was quickly seen that the one presiding over the group should also be the one presiding over prayer gatherings. So the Supernatural Meaning of Holy Orders takes the leadership and presidential role and gives it grace to administer the sacraments at the service of the rest of the community.

At his ordination, the man is configured to Christ the Head of the Church. All of the faithful are priests in terms of offering sacrifice (the Eucharist) and, by virtue of their baptism, are made members of the Body of Christ. In ordination, the priest remains in the Body, but acts on behalf of the Head, Christ. He leads the prayers of the faithful during the sacrifice. This configuration to Christ helps us with some common questions about the priesthood. Why do I have to go to confession to a priest, why can't I talk directly to God? Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest has been configured to Christ the Head, and so you ARE speaking directly to God. And from God you are hearing the words of forgiveness. Another question is: why can only celibate men be priests? To most represent Christ sacramentally, we hold up the physical identity of Christ. All priests then should be male and celibate to more fully symbolize Christ the Head. This does not diminish the role of women in the church, as they are full members of the Body of Christ as well.

(Acts 6:1-7)

At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

(1 Tim 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.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Essentials of the Rite of Ordination