



Sacraments 23/35: Essentials of the Rite of Ordination

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred during the rite of Ordination in a Mass. By way of review, each sacrament contains Matter and Form. The Matter is the physical “stuff” that is to be en-graced / made sacred. In Holy Orders, the Matter is the male candidate. The Form in a sacrament is the way the ritual must be carried out. In Holy Orders, the Form has at its core essence the Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Ordination.

As with all sacramental ritual, there are additional explanatory rites that accompany the essentials by way of explanation. At his ordination, a deacon is handed a Book of the Gospels to show his role in proclaiming and preaching. A priest is handed a chalice and paten to show his role in presiding at the Eucharist. The priest also has his hands anointed with Chrism. These hands will be the ones bringing about the Eucharist and anointing the sick. A bishop is given his staff, mitre, and ring. All three are taken aside during the ceremony and dressed in their vestments.

Who can perform the Sacrament of Holy Orders? Only a bishop can preside at the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he cannot delegate it. A single bishop presides at the ordination of deacons and priests. When a deacon is ordained, only the bishop lays his hands on his head, showing the deacon as at the service of the bishops. When a priest is ordained, after the bishop, all priests present also lay on hands, to show the collegial nature of the priesthood. At the ordination of a bishop, 3 other bishops are required: a principal consecrator, and 2 co-consecrators. Any other bishops present will also lay on hands.

During the ceremony, each person ordained has a list of promises that he takes. These are different from religious vows in that vows make a person the religious, while the laying on of hands makes the man a priest. Yet the promises are still sacred. We promise to pray with and for the people, to supply the sacraments, to try to lead a holy life of example, and to preach the Word of God.

There are 2 types of deacons, transitional and permanent. Permanent deacons are men possibly already married, but not intending on proceeding on to the priesthood. Transitional deacons are unmarried and plan on proceeding to the priesthood. At their ordination to the transitional diaconate, all men make a promise of celibacy. As Christ was unmarried, the cleric is unmarried to more fully represent him. As Christ is the Head and the Church is the Body, the Head is married to the Body. So I as a priest remain celibate to show my marriage to the Church. There are times of loneliness and it can be a struggle. But these promises were freely chosen as a sacrifice. Never in these struggles is there an automatic desire for things unnatural. In a heterosexual male, the struggles of celibacy create a desire for a similarly aged female. There is no amount of loneliness or lack of prayer that would lead one to desire another male or a child. Celibacy does not create a different sexual attraction.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Tri-Partite Theology of the Sacrament of Holy Orders