

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Last week we looked at the Sacrament of Matrimony. I said that it was the form of all the other Sacraments in that Sacraments pour out God's *grace* – His gift of relationship with us, and that relationship looks like the self-donative love that the Father pours out to the Son in the Holy Spirit, and the love that Christ Jesus has for us, the Church. God is the lover of our souls, and since He wants to marry us, every other Sacrament takes its form from this basic truth.

This week, we'll look at the Sacrament of Holy Orders – Bishops, Priests and Deacons. Matrimony is a sign of everlasting life – it shows us what God wills for our eternity: an eternal Marriage Feast (if you don't believe me, read the book of Revelation, which keeps talking about the Marriage Feast of the Lamb!). Holy Orders – and specifically the promise of celibacy – is also a sign of this reality, but in a different way. While husbands and wives model in their bodies (most profoundly symbolized in the conjugal act) and in their lives the love that God wants to pour on us for eternity, celibates give us the sign in this world, consecrating their bodies here and now for God, as a sign that we believe in that eternal marriage feast. Female celibates (as a sign of the Church) show in their bodies that they believe Jesus is their only spouse, and male celibates (as a sign of Christ) show in their bodies, that Jesus has only the Church as His spouse. This is why, even though celibacy is not essential to the Sacrament of Holy Orders (take Deacon John or Deacon Tom, who are both married, for instance), it is not a *passé* practice, but a necessary sign for the Church.

The role of Holy Orders is never about power or greatness (nor is anything in the Christian life); all authority in the Church is about *service*. Holy Orders is given to us to serve the Church as priest, prophet and king, or, to use other words, to draw us to God through the Sacraments, to preach the Good News of salvation to us, and to shepherd us, protecting us from evil and leading us to the Heart of God. All the ordained – bishops, priests, and deacons – are called to help lead us away from the evil in this world, and to draw us closer to the Heart of God – through actions and words. Bishops have a broader scope of persons to reach than deacons or priests, but priests often have more “on the ground” contact in a parish setting, and deacons often can reach many who do not come to Church through their work and other activities. All the ordained are called to preach the Good News of Salvation. Bishops can confer all of the Sacraments, while priests can baptize, consecrate the Eucharist, absolve from sins in confession, anoint with the Sacrament of the Sick, and witness marriages, and, in certain circumstances with proper delegation, Confirm. Deacons can baptize and witness marriages, and they can also preside at funerals outside of the context of Mass.

A little more about the distinction of the three levels of Holy Orders. Bishops share in the fullness of Holy Orders, and they are successors of the Apostles (remember that we believe in “one, holy, catholic and *apostolic* Church”), and lead the Church with the authority of the apostles – which is the authority of Christ, since He gave them His own authority. This is important, because whether we like our bishop or not, he is to receive our respect, for he bears the authority of Christ. Does this mean he'll always be right? No! Let's be honest, the Apostles weren't that great either – but Jesus *chose* them anyway, as He chooses our bishops. Whether they “earn” it or not, they deserve our respect. I believe it was St. Ignatius of Antioch who said that where the bishop is, there is the Church. This is a mystical reality, for the Church is not an organization, but the very Body of Christ, and we are His presence here on earth! We may not be able to see this clearly in ourselves or in our clergy, but we trust that Jesus means what He says, and somehow His presence is here!

Priests share in the ministry of the bishop – they are coworkers with the bishop. They are his hands and voice throughout the Diocese. They are called to bring the Sacraments and the Good News to the flock of Jesus. There is only *one priest* – Jesus. Every other priest shares in priesthood of Christ, the high priest.

The word deacon comes from the word “servant” in Greek. While the word “servant” may sound degrading, remember that in the Christian life, the goal is to become conformed to Christ, not to gain authority or power. Christ called Himself a servant, and He reminded His disciples that He came not to be served but to serve. In this, deacons are called in a special way to imitate Christ the Servant.

The *matter* of Holy Orders is a baptized male. The Sacred Chrism is used in the ordination of priests and bishops. The *form* of Holy Order is the laying on of hands by the bishop(s), and the prayer of ordination, as well as anointing the priest's hands, or the bishop's head with Chrism. The *intention* is to conform to be conformed to Christ the Servant, or Christ the High Priest.