

## **Priesthood and Holy Orders**

**CTL 2/6/15**

### Questions about the Priesthood

#### **What is a priest?**

A priest is a man who has been ordained for a distinctive role as a minister of the sacraments. He celebrates the Eucharist and witnesses marriages, baptizes babies and adults, and brings God's healing presence to people through the sacraments of penance (confession) and anointing of the sick. He is involved in a variety of other works as well—most often parish-related—but sacramental life is his special ministry.

#### **What can priests do that non-priests (the laity) can't?**

Priests can consecrate a host, and perform the Sacraments of Confession and Anointing of the Sick. In special cases priests can also perform the Sacrament of Confirmation.

#### **Why is there a priesthood?**

The priesthood exists to carry out the role Christ gave to the Apostles, both in ministering to the Church and fulfilling his commands "Do this in memory of me" and "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them". In Acts, we see the Apostles ordained presbyters (the word from which we get priest) in the different places where they establish a church, and the writing of the Early Church describes their role in terms very similar to our priests: two of the earliest examples are when 1 Clement defends their succession from the Apostles and compares denial of it to opposition to the Old Testament priesthood, and Ignatius of Antioch declares that only the bishop and those appointed by him can offer the Eucharist.

#### **Who has the authority to determine who can be a priest or not, and why?**

Bishops, as they are the one who ordain priests, although there are limits to who they can ordain.

#### **Why can't priests marry?**

A priest is a witness to the life of the world to come. As a witness, it is their job to help others to get to Heaven. Marriage would hamper a priest from being able to help others to get to Heaven, because it would distract him. He would be unable to equally fulfill his duties as a husband and a priest.

#### **Why can't women be priests?**

"She [the Church] holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church."(1)

#### **Doesn't 1 Peter 2:5-9 say we are all priests?**

This verse (and a few others) do endorse the idea, which the Catholic Church supports that we are all called to a form of priesthood, in the sense that we are all called "to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). However, this priestly role of all believers does not preclude a separate priesthood within the Church: the phrase Peter uses in 1 Peter 2:9, "a royal priesthood", is also used in Exodus 19 to describe the role of the nation of Israel, but the very same chapter of Exodus contains references to a select priesthood of only some members of the community.

#### **What's the difference between diocesan priests and religious priests?**

"A diocesan priest ordinarily serves the church within a geographic area called a diocese. He ordinarily serves the people as a parish priest, but he may also be involved in many other forms of ministry like teaching, hospital ministry, campus ministry, or prison ministry. A religious priest is a member of a religious congregation whose ministry goes beyond the geographic limits of any diocese. A religious priest seeks to live a life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience within a community of men. The community shares a common vision and spirituality and often emphasizes a particular type of ministry." (2)

#### **Can a priest ever stop being a priest?**

'It is possible for a priest to be released from the duties and responsibilities that are connected to the clerical state ([CCC 1583](#)). Practically speaking, this would mean that a priest no longer functioned outwardly as a priest. He would no longer engage in ministry within his diocese or religious institute; no longer celebrate Mass or confer the sacraments; no longer be called "Father" or wear clerical clothing; and no longer be supported financially by the Church. To the world he would appear to be a layman, working at an ordinary job and living the normal life of the laity. Canon law refers to this change as the "loss of the clerical state" (cf. [cc. 290-293](#)). Common parlance calls it laicization. ...

When this occurs, and a priest is released from the clerical state, he is still technically a priest, but as [canon 292](#) notes, he may no longer exercise the power of orders. Since this is what the priest is requesting anyway, there is usually little fear that he will violate this restriction. But in theory, if a laicized priest were to say Mass, it would be a valid Mass, since he never loses the ability to celebrate the Eucharist. It would, however, be illicit. (The difference between an invalid act, and an act that is valid but illicit, was discussed in greater detail back in "[Are They Really Catholic? Part II.](#)")'

<http://canonlawmadeeasy.com/2009/11/12/can-a-priest-ever-return-to-the-lay-state/>

### Questions about the Sacrament of Holy Orders

#### **Are there different ranks of clergy? If so what are the differences between them?**

Yes. They are deacon, priest, and bishop. All three are conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. "Only the ordained bishop and priest may be ministers of Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Only bishops may ordain deacons, priests, and other bishops. ... Deacons in the Latin Church can baptize and witness the Sacrament of Marriage, as do priests and bishops." (3)

#### **What is the biblical justification of the Sacrament of Holy Orders?**

The New Testament, primarily in Acts, refers several times to presbyters (the word from which we get priest) being ordained (see Acts 14:22, Titus 1:5), and in Acts 13:1-4, it describes this being done by the Apostles laying hands on the men being ordained and praying over them.

#### Selected Bibliography:

- (1)-[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html)
- (2)-<http://www.vocationnetwork.org/articles/show/131>
- (3)-<http://www.stjosephct.org/sacraments/holy-orders/43-holy-orders-bishop-priest-deacon>
- (4)-[http://www.thesacredpage.com/2013/03/why-priests-part-3-priesthood-of\\_20.html](http://www.thesacredpage.com/2013/03/why-priests-part-3-priesthood-of_20.html)
- (5)-<http://www.thesacredpage.com/2013/03/why-priests-part-4-priesthood-of.html>