

Topic 24: Marriage and Holy Orders

Marriage is an institution foreseen by God in his wisdom, so as to carry out in humanity his divine plan of love. It is born of the personal and irrevocable consent of the spouses. The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility. This special covenant is ordered to the procreation and education of children, who are the most excellent gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of their parents.

10/05/2022

The Father, in his loving plan, has chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world, in order to raise us to the dignity of God's children (cf. Eph 1:4-5). Furthermore, he wants to count on the cooperation of mankind in order to bring about his plan of salvation. Within these designs of divine Providence, the sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders bestow on Christians a specific vocation and mission in the Church (cf. *Catechism*, 1534).

The Sacrament of Matrimony

Marriage is not “the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a

consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives. The marriage of those who have been baptized is, in addition, invested with the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace, for it represents the union of Christ and His Church.”^[1] —

“In its deepest reality, love is essentially gift and conjugal love, which while leading the spouses to the reciprocal ‘knowledge’ which makes them ‘one flesh’ (cf. Gen 2:24), is not exhausted within the couple, since it makes them capable of the greatest possible self-giving, by which they become God’s co-operators in the gift of life to a new human person.”^[2] —

This mutual love between the spouses “becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes (Gen 1:31). And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: ‘And God blessed them, and God said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28)” (*Catechism*, 1604).

The specific gift that characterises conjugal love is found in the persons as reciprocal sexual beings in order to generate new life. No person can become a parent alone or with another person of the same sex, because paternity and maternity constitute a single principle of generation. Therefore, in conjugal love, the acceptance of the gift possesses a dynamism that is entirely its own and distinct from other

languages of love: only in conjugal love is there an identity between the offering of the gift and the acceptance of the gift. Indeed, the acceptance of the gift of paternity takes place through the giving of the gift of maternity and vice versa. Therefore be no more intimate communion of love is possible between two persons who, in the words of Sacred Scripture, are *one flesh* (Gen 2:24).

The dynamic of conjugal self-giving described above shows that conjugal love does not arise spontaneously but from the free self-giving of each person. Because this self-giving is mutual, it is a love that is due to one another person. This truth is taught by St. Paul when he writes that “the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor 7:4). The apostle conveys the same

lesson when he reminds husbands that they “should love their wives as their own bodies” (Eph 5:28).

Marriage, as a natural institution, has the dimension of justice that is inherent in conjugal love: “The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator.”^[3]

Since the marriage community is the natural foundation of the family and the basic unit of society, it does not belong exclusively to the private sphere, but is a good of public interest. Society protects marriage through its legal institution: civil marriage in society and canonical marriage in the Church. For the legalisation of marriage to be truly

useful for the common good, the law must conform to the essence of what marriage is, i.e. as a natural institution, and also as a sacrament in the case of canonical marriage.

In many countries it is common for people to cohabit in the manner of husband and wife, but without any institutional bond. The reasons are various: “the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic.”^[4] — If the relationship is established by a sincere will for marriage, then the need exists to

help them to legalise their situation. If there is no such will, the couple should be helped to discover the lie that is present in their relationship, because conjugal love “demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another” (*Catechism*, 2391). “The expression ‘free union’ is fallacious: what can ‘union’ mean when the partners make no commitment to one another, each exhibiting a lack of trust in the other, in himself, or in the future?” (*Catechism*, 2390)

If we look at creation from the perspective of Christ, we discover that this divine action “is the foundation of ‘all God’s saving plans,’ ‘the beginning of the history of salvation’ which culminates in Christ” (*Catechism*, 280). From this point of view, the institution of marriage at the natural level can be seen as endowed with a new dignity: it was instituted by God as a type or figure for the union between Christ

and the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32). Because of this connection between the marital bond and Christ's love, conjugal love not only participates in God's creative love but also in his saving love, transmitting together with human life the life of grace in Christ.^[5]—

Original sin introduced the rupture of mankind with God and simultaneously the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. The institution of marriage in turn has been weakened by the appearance of polygamy and divorce, and carnal parenthood now transmits original sin instead of the life of the children of God.

The Old Law, in conformity with divine pedagogy, neither criticises the polygamy of the patriarchs nor forbids divorce; but “seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love

(cf. Hos 1-3; Is 54:62, Jer 2-3:31; Ezek 16, 23), the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage (cf. Mal 2:13-17)” (*Catechism*, 1611).

Moreover, the renewal of the original divine blessing on Abraham, together with the promise of innumerable descendants to whom God would give the land of Canaan (cf. Gen 12:2.7; 13:16; 22:17), gives marriage a fundamental role in the fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation. Without marriage, the covenant made by God with Abraham and his descendants, which in the light of the New Testament is a figure for the covenant between Christ and the Church (cf. Gal 3:26-29), would not be fulfilled.

“Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and the family to their original form (cf. Mt 10:1-12). Marriage and the family

have been redeemed by Christ (cf. Eph 5:21-32) and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which all true love flows. The spousal covenant, originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation, takes on its full meaning in Christ and his Church. Through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to bear witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion. The Gospel of the family spans the history of the world, from the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), to the fulfilment of the mystery of the covenant in Christ at the end of time with the marriage of the Lamb (cf. Rev 19:9).”^[6] —

Celebration of Marriage

Marriage is born of the personal and irrevocable consent of the spouses

(cf. *Catechism*, 1626). “Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage” (*Code of Canon Law*, 1057 §2).

“The Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form” (*Catechism*, 1631). Therefore, “only those marriages are valid which are contracted before the local ordinary, pastor, or a priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who assist, and before two witnesses according to the rules expressed” in the Code of Canon Law (*Code*, 1108 §1).

There are several reasons behind this norm. Sacramental marriage creates rights and duties in the community of the Church between spouses and towards their children. Since

marriage is a state of life in the Church, there must be certainty about it (hence the obligation to have witnesses); and the public character of consent protects the “I do” once given and helps spouses to remain faithful to their vows (cf. *Catechism*, 1631).

“The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament” (*Code of Canon Law*, 1056). Husband and wife “by the marriage covenant are no longer two, but one flesh (cf. Mt 19:6) . . . As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.”^[7] —

““The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made

clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection.’^[8] *Polygamy* is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive” (*Catechism*, 1645).

“In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning: permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts (cf. Mt 19:8). The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it ‘what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6)” (*Catechism*, 1614). By virtue of the sacrament, by which Christian spouses manifest and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32), indissolubility acquires a new and deeper meaning by increasing

the original solidity of the conjugal bond, so that “a marriage that is *ratum [that is, celebrated between baptised persons] et consummatum [that is, consummated by the conjugal act between the spouses]* can be dissolved by no human power and by no cause, except death” (*Code of Canon Law*, 1141).

“*Divorce* is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign” (*Catechism*, 2384). “It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly

abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage” (*Catechism*, 2386).

“Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation” (*Catechism*, 1649). If, after separation, “civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense” (*Catechism*, 2383).

If, after divorce, a new union is contracted, even if recognised by civil law, “the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery” (*Catechism*, 2384). Remarried divorcees, although they continue to belong to the Church, cannot be admitted to the Eucharist, because their state and condition of life objectively contradicts the indissoluble union of love between Christ and the Church; this union is signified and actualised in the Eucharist.^[9] “Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and

a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they ‘take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.’”^[10] —

These norms should be applied with compassion towards the persons and the real challenges they face. The Church should avoid placing so many conditions on divine mercy that it is emptied of meaning.^[11] — This means taking into account that the penitent, “though faithful to the intention of sinning no more, due to past experiences and the awareness of present weakness may have the fear of new falls; but this does not harm the authenticity of the intention, when this fear is joined to the will, supported by prayer, to do what is possible to avoid guilt.”^[12] — The penitent, because of the specific circumstances in which he finds himself, may not be fully responsible

for his own acts. The confessor must take these factors into account in assessing what the penitent can do to avoid guilt. Thus, the confessor can reach moral certainty that the penitent has sufficient contrition to receive absolution.^[13]_____

In any case, if there is a new fall, the person should approach the sacrament of confession before receiving communion. In fact, sexual relations with someone who is not the legitimate spouse are always, by their object, intrinsically evil.

Moreover, since their repentance is in itself hidden, “while their condition as persons who are divorced and remarried is *per se* manifest, they will be able to receive Eucharistic Communion only *remoto scandalo*.”^[14]_____ Finally, we should also bear in mind that the reception of the Eucharist is not meant to be the goal of the journey of conversion, but rather a precious help to continue

taking the necessary steps to live in a situation that no longer contrasts with Jesus' teaching on marriage.^[15]_____

Responsible parenthood

“By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.’ Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: ‘It is not good that man should be alone,’ and ‘from the beginning [he] made them male and female’; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing

the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day” (*Catechism*, 1652).^[16]___

Hence, “among the couples who fulfil their God-given task . . . those merit special mention who with a magnanimous heart and with wise and shared deliberation, undertake to bring up in a dignified way a large family.”^[17]___

Even with a generous disposition towards parenthood, “certain modern conditions often keep couples from arranging their married lives harmoniously, and . . . they find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily the size of their families should not be increased.”^[18]___ “If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or

from external circumstances, the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth.”^[19] —

“According to God’s plan, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordered to the procreation and education of offspring, in which they find their crowning glory.”^[20] —

““Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society,’ the family is ‘the first and vital cell of society.’”^[21] — This essential and vital public role of marriage and the family calls for its defence and

encouragement on the part of public authorities.

Within the Church, the family is called the “domestic Church” because the unique communion among its members is meant to be “a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion.”^[22] “Parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.”^[23] “It is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way ‘by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.’ Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and ‘a school for human enrichment.’ Here one

learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life” (*Catechism*, 1657).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

From among the people of Israel, designated in Ex 19:6 as a “kingdom of priests,” the tribe of Levi was chosen by God for the service of the “tabernacle of the testimony” (Num 1:50). In turn, from among the Levites, the priests of the Old Covenant were consecrated with the rite of anointing (cf. Ex 29:1-7), while conferring on them a function “on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb 5:1). As an element of the Mosaic law, this priesthood is an introduction to “a better hope” (Heb 7:19), “a shadow of the good things to come,” but in itself this

priesthood“can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near” (Heb 10:1).

The Levitical priesthood prefigured in the Chosen People the full realisation of the priesthood in Jesus Christ, whose priesthood was not bound to genealogy, nor to the sacrifices of the temple, nor to the Law, but only to God himself (cf. Heb 6:17-20 and 7:1ff). Hence, he was “designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:10), who “by a single offering . . . has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Indeed, the Incarnate Word of God, in fulfilment of the messianic prophecies, redeems all men by his Death and Resurrection, thus giving his own life in fulfilling his priestly identity. This priesthood, which Jesus himself presents in terms of consecration and mission (cf. Jn

10:14), therefore has universal value: there is no “salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ.”^[24] —

At the Last Supper, Jesus manifests his desire to make his apostles sharers in his priesthood, which is described in terms of consecration and mission: “As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (Jn 17:18-19). This participation becomes a reality at different moments in the course of Christ’s ministry, which can be considered as successive steps leading to the institution of Holy Orders: when Christ calls the apostles and establishes them as a college (cf. Mk 3:13-19), when he instructs them and sends them out to preach (cf. Lk 9:1-6), when he confers on them the power to forgive sins (cf. Jn 20:22-23), when he entrusts them with the

universal missionary mandate (cf. Mt 28:18-20); and in a very special way when he commands them to celebrate the Eucharist: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24). The apostles “were fully confirmed [in their mission] on the day of Pentecost.”^[25] —

During their lifetime, the apostles “not only had helpers in their ministry, but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death passed on to their immediate cooperators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves . . . and gave them the order that, when they should have died, other approved men would take up their ministry . . . Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they

are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.”^[26] —

In the New Testament, the apostolic ministry is transmitted through the laying on of hands accompanied by prayer (cf. Acts 6:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6); this is the practice found in the most ancient rites of ordination, such as those recorded in the *Traditio Apostolica* and the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*. This essential core, which constitutes the sacramental sign, has been enriched over the centuries by a number of complementary rites, which may differ according to the various liturgical traditions. “In the Latin Church, the initial rites – presentation and election of the ordinand, instruction by the bishop, examination of the candidate, litany of the saints – attest that the choice of the candidate is made in keeping with the practice of the Church and

prepare for the solemn act of consecration, after which several rites symbolically express and complete the mystery accomplished: for bishop and priest, an anointing with holy chrism, a sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit who makes their ministry fruitful; giving the book of the Gospels, the ring, the miter, and the crosier to the bishop as the sign of his apostolic mission to proclaim the Word of God, of his fidelity to the Church, the bride of Christ, and his office as shepherd of the Lord's flock; presentation to the priest of the paten and chalice, 'the offering of the holy people' which he is called to present to God; giving the book of the Gospels to the deacon who has just received the mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ" (*Catechism*, 1574).

Nature and effects of the Order received

The sacrament of Holy Orders confers a participation in the priesthood of Christ, in the manner handed down by apostolic succession. The ministerial priesthood is distinguished from the common priesthood of the faithful, which comes from Baptism and Confirmation. Both “are interrelated” and ordered to another; but “they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree.”^[27] It is proper and specific to the ministerial priesthood to be “a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ – the head and shepherd,”^[28] which makes it possible to exercise the authority of Christ in the pastoral function of preaching and government, and to act *in persona Christi* in the exercise of the sacramental ministry.

The “representation of Christ the Head” (*repraesentatio Christi Capitis*) always subsists in the minister, whose soul has been sealed with the

sacramental character, indelibly impressed at ordination. This character is, therefore, the principal effect of the sacrament, and being a permanent reality, it renders the order incapable of being either repeated or removed, or conferred for a limited time. “It is true that someone validly ordained can, for grave reasons, be discharged from the obligations and functions linked to ordination, or can be forbidden to exercise them; but he cannot become a layman again in the strict sense” (*Catechism*, 1583).

Ordination in each of its degrees also confers “the grace of the Holy Spirit proper to this sacrament,” which is the “configuration to Christ as Priest, Teacher, and Pastor, of whom the ordained is made a minister” (*Catechism*, 1585). This role as minister is both gift and task, for ordination is received in view of service to Christ and to the faithful,

who in the Church form his Mystical Body. More specifically, for the bishop the gift received is “the Spirit of government which you gave to your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and he in turn communicated it to the holy apostles.”^[29] For the priest, the Church asks for the gift of the Spirit of God “that he may be worthy to come before your altar without reproach, to proclaim the gospel of your kingdom, to minister your word of truth, to offer you spiritual gifts and sacrifices, to renew your people by the bath of regeneration, so that they may go to meet our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”^[30] In the case of deacons, “by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God.”^[31]

Degrees of Holy Orders

The diaconate, the presbyterate and the episcopate retain an intrinsic relationship with one another as degrees of the one sacramental reality of Holy Orders.

The episcopate is “the fullness of the sacrament of Orders,” which “in the Church's liturgical practice and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the supreme power of the sacred ministry.”^[32] — Bishops are entrusted with “the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.”^[33] — They are successors of the apostles and members of the episcopal college, into which they are incorporated immediately by virtue of ordination. Within this college, they maintain hierarchical communion with the Pope, the head of the college, and with the other

members. They are primarily responsible for the function of authority in the Church, both in the universal Church and in presiding over the local Churches. They govern over these local Churches as “vicars and ambassadors of Christ” and they do so “by their counsel, exhortations, example, and also by their authority and sacred power.”^[34] — Among the episcopal duties “the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice.” And “when they teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff, they are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth.”^[35] — Finally, as stewards of the grace of the supreme priesthood, they exercise authority

over the proper and fruitful practice of the sacraments: “They direct the conferring of baptism, by which a sharing in the kingly priesthood of Christ is granted. They are the original ministers of confirmation, dispensers of sacred Orders and the moderators of penitential discipline, and they earnestly exhort and instruct their people to carry out with faith and reverence their part in the liturgy and especially in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.”^[36]

The priesthood was instituted by God so that its ministers “are able by the sacred power of orders to offer sacrifice and to forgive sins, and they perform their priestly office publicly for men in the name of Christ.”^[37] To priests the ministerial function has been entrusted “in a lesser degree indeed,” so that “established in the order of the priesthood they can be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the

apostolic mission.”^[38] The priesthood “shares the authority by which Christ builds up, sanctifies and rules his Body,” and through the sacramental order they have received priests “are signed with a special character and are conformed to Christ the Priest in such a way that they can act in the person of Christ the Head.”^[39] They “constitute one priesthood with their bishop although bound by a diversity of duties”^[40] and carry out their mission in immediate contact with people. More concretely, priests “have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all. In this way they fulfill the command of the Lord: ‘Going therefore into the whole world preach the Gospel to every creature.’”^[41] Their function is centred “in the Eucharistic worship or the celebration of the Mass by which acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His Mystery they unite the prayers of the faithful with the sacrifice of their Head and renew

and apply in the sacrifice of the Mass until the coming of the Lord the only sacrifice of the New Testament namely that of Christ offering Himself once for all a spotless Victim to the Father.”^[42] This role is linked to the “the ministry of alleviation and reconciliation,” which they exercise “for the sick and the sinners among the faithful.” As true shepherds, “exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head, they gather together God's family as a brotherhood all of one mind, and lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, to God the Father.”^[43]

Deacons constitute the lowest level of the hierarchy. They have their hands laid on them “not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service,” which they exercise as a representation of Christ the Servant (*repraesentatio Christi Servi*). The diaconate is responsible “to

administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services.”^[44] —

Minister and recipient of this sacrament

The administration of Holy Orders in its three degrees is reserved exclusively to the bishop: in the New Testament only the apostles confer it, and, “since the sacrament of Holy Orders is the sacrament of the apostolic ministry, it is for the bishops as the successors of the apostles to hand on the ‘gift of the Spirit,’ the ‘apostolic line.’ Validly ordained bishops, i.e., those who are

in the line of apostolic succession, validly confer the three degrees of the sacrament of Holy Orders” (*Catechism*, 1576). The three degrees have been preserved down the centuries in the ordained ministry.

For the licitness of episcopal ordination, in the Latin Church, an explicit mandate of the Roman Pontiff is required (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 1013); in the Eastern Churches this mandate is reserved to the Roman Pontiff, the Patriarch or the Metropolitan, and is always illicit in the absence of a legitimate mandate (cf. *Code of Canons of Eastern Churches*, 745). In the case of priestly and diaconal ordinations, it is required that the ordaining bishop be the candidate’s own bishop, or have received the dimissorial letter from the competent authority (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 1015-1016); if the ordination takes place outside the

ordinand's own circumscription, the permission of the diocesan bishop is necessary (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 1017).

For the validity of ordination, in its three degrees, it is necessary that the candidate be male and baptised. Christ, in fact, chose only men as apostles, even though among those who followed him there were also women, who on several occasions showed greater fidelity. This conduct of the Lord is normative for the whole life of the Church and cannot be considered circumstantial, since the apostles already felt bound by this practice and laid hands only on men. Such was the case, even when the Church was spread in regions where the presence of women in the ministry would not have raised perplexity. The Fathers of the Church faithfully followed this norm, aware that it was a binding tradition, which was properly reflected in synodal

decrees. The Church, therefore, “does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.”^[45] —

A legitimate and fully fruitful ordination also requires, on the part of the candidate, the supernatural reality of a vocation, which is confirmed by the invitation of the competent authority (the “call of the hierarchy”). In the Latin Church the law of ecclesiastical celibacy applies to all three degrees; it “is not demanded by the very nature of the priesthood,”^[46] but “has many-faceted suitability for the priesthood,” for by this gift clerics participate in the celibate way of life taken on by Christ to accomplish his mission” “they adhere to Him more easily with an undivided heart, they dedicate themselves more freely in Him and through Him to the service of God and men.” By the full dedication of their lives to the mission entrusted to

them, ordained men “evoke the mysterious marriage established by Christ . . . in which the Church has Christ as her only Spouse. They give, moreover, a living sign of the world to come, by a faith and charity already made present, in which the children of the resurrection neither marry nor take wives.”^[47] Permanent deacons, as well as deacons and priests of the Eastern Churches, are not obliged to celibacy. Finally, in order to be ordained, there is a need for certain internal and external dispositions, the required age and knowledge, the fulfilment of the prerequisites for ordination and the absence of impediments and irregularities (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 1029-1042; *Code of Canons of Eastern Churches*, 758-762). Particular conditions apply to candidates for episcopal ordination to ensure their suitability (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 378).

Basic Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church,
1533-1600, 1601-1666, 2331-2400.

Saint Josemaría, *Conversations with
Mgr Escrivá*, 87-112.

Saint Josemaría, Homily *Marriage, a
Christian vocation*, in *Christ Is
Passing By*, 22-30.

Saint Josemaría, Homily *A Priest
Forever*, in *In Love with the Church*,
34-50.

^[1] Saint Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 25
July 1968, 8.

^[2] Saint John Paul II, General
Audience, 6 October 1982, 7.

[3] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, 11.

[4] Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 40.

[5] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

[6] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 63.

[7] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 48. “Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love . . . Thus, trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice, married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfilment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit

themselves of the duty to procreate” (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 50).

[8] The citation in the *Catechism* is from Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 49.

[9] Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 22 February 2007, 29; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on the Reception of Eucharistic Communion by the Divorced and Remarried Faithful, 14 September 1994; *Catechism*, 1650.

[10] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84. Citation is from John Paul II, Homily at the Close of the Sixth Synod of Bishops, 25 October 1980, 7.

[11] Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, 307-312.

[12] John Paul II, Letter to Card. William W. Baum and participants in

the Annual Seminar on Internal Law organised by the Apostolic Penitentiary, 22 March 1996; cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, 311.

[13] Cf. *ibid.*, 303-305.

[14] Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, *On the Admissibility to Holy Communion of Remarried Divorced Persons*, 24 June 2000, 2.

[15] Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*, 307-308.

[16] The *Catechism* cites the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 48 and 50.

[17] *Gaudium et Spes.*, 50.

[18] *Ibid.*, 51.

[19] *Paul VI, Humanae Vitae*, 16.

[20] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 14. “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society

and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, art. 16).

[21] *Ibid.*, 42; the quotation cites Vatican Council II, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, “Family, marriage and *de facto* unions,” Vatican City 2000; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations on projects for the legal recognition of unions between homosexual persons*, Vatican City 2003.

[22] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

[23] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

[24] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, 6 August 2000, 14.

[25] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 19.

[26] *Ibid.*, 20.

[27] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

[28] John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 15 March 1992, 15.

[29] Roman Pontifical, Episcopal ordination, Consecratory prayer.

[30] Byzantine Rite, Prayer of priestly ordination.

[31] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 29.

[32] *Ibid.*, 21.

[33] *Ibid.*, 20.

[34] *Ibid.*, 27.

[35] *Ibid.*, 25.

[36] *Ibid.*, 26.

[37] *Vatican Council II, Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 28.

[41] Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4.

[42] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 28.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid*, 29.

[45] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, October 15, 1976, 100; cited by Saint John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994, 2.

^[46] Second Vatican Council,
Presbyterorum Ordinis, 16.

^[47] *Ibid.*

pdf | document generated
automatically from [https://opusdei.org/
en-tt/article/topic-24-marriage-and-holy-
orders/](https://opusdei.org/en-tt/article/topic-24-marriage-and-holy-orders/) (03/09/2026)