

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Holy Orders – When Jesus Calls, We Ought to Listen and Respond

In our Church, we have two Sacraments of Vocation – Holy Orders and Marriage. Today, we’ll discuss Holy Orders – the Sacrament that gives us bishops, priests and deacons.

As we discussed several weeks ago, everyone who is baptized, is baptized as “a priest, prophet and king.” [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, July 22, “I Baptize You Priest, Prophet and King”] So, why do we have a separate Sacrament to designate certain men as deacons, priests, and bishops? Well, of course, the main reason is because Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Holy Orders for that specific purpose. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] explains it this way: While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace --a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit--, the ministerial priesthood is [...] a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders. [CCC 1547]

From this statement, it is logical that those who share in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ would therefore act in the person of Christ the Head of His Body the Church (*in persona Christi capitis*), when they are acting to “build up and lead the Church,” especially through the Sacraments. For example, when the priest prays the words of consecration through the Eucharistic prayer, he is acting in the person of Christ to transubstantiate (i.e. change) the elements of bread and wine into

the Body and Blood of Christ. When he absolves sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is Christ who absolves through the ministry of the priest. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, August 5, “God gives us a Second Chance...and a Third...and...”] This same ministry of Christ, through the ministry of the ordained, continues to the other sacraments, as well.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders consecrates men for one of three distinct offices: bishop, priest and deacon. When Jesus first established the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he conferred his ministry specifically on the Apostles. “[Jesus] said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” [JN 20:21-22] With this statement, Jesus consecrated His Apostles as the first bishops. Shortly after Jesus Ascension, the Apostles realized that they needed some help with the ministry of the Church, so they ordained the first deacons, through the laying on of hands. [Acts 6:2-6] As the Church began to grow and spread throughout the known world, the early Church not only elected more bishops but began to ordain, through the imposition of hands, certain men as co-workers with the bishops, called presbyters. [e.g. 1 Tim 4:14 and Titus 1:5] These presbyters later became known as priests.

Next week, we will continue our discussion of the Sacraments of Vocation with the Sacrament of Marriage, then we will discuss other vocations of life.

