

# St. Mark Seeker's Study Guide

---

## February 15, 2017: Sacraments of Service: Marriage and Holy Orders

### SACRAMENTS OF SERVICE

A sacrament is a visible sign of an unseen reality. Holy Orders and Matrimony belong to the Sacraments at the Service of Communion. This means they are primarily directed toward the salvation of others. The recipients of these Sacraments grow in holiness through their service to others. In this section, we reflect on the sacrament of marriage as a visible sign of an unseen reality.

### THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Sacred Scripture begins with the creation and union of man and woman and ends with “the wedding feast of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7, 9). Woman and man are equal in human dignity, and in marriage both are united in an unbreakable bond.

#### *Christ's teaching on marriage*

Jesus brought to full awareness the divine plan for marriage. In John's Gospel, Christ's first miracle occurs at the wedding in Cana. “The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence” (CCC, no. 1613). Jesus unequivocally taught the indissolubility of marriage: Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate. (Mt 19:3-6) The Sacrament of Marriage is a covenant, which is more than a contract. Covenant always expresses a relationship between persons.



## ***The liturgy of Marriage***

According to the Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. In the Latin Church, the free consent of the couple is at the heart of the marriage celebration. By Church law, when two Catholics marry they must exchange this consent in the presence of the Church's minister, two witnesses, and the congregation. The priest or deacon calls forth this consent, but the marriage itself takes place through the public consent of the couple. The priest invites the couple to do so in these words: "Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands and declare your consent before God and his Church." There are various formulas for this consent. One that may be used is as follows: "I, [Name], take you, [Name], to be my [wife/husband]. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life." The consent is further symbolized in the Latin Church by the blessing and exchange of rings with the words: "Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

## ***The purposes of marriage***

The marriage covenant, by which a man and woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. These purposes are protected and fostered by the permanence of the marriage bond and the mutual fidelity of the spouses

## ***The effects of the sacrament***

The first effect of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the gift of the bond between the spouses. "The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself" (CCC, no. 1639). The grace of this Sacrament perfects the love of husband and wife, binds them together in fidelity, and helps them welcome and care for children. Christ is the source of this grace and he dwells with the spouses to strengthen their covenant promises, to bear each other's burdens with forgiveness and kindness, and to experience ahead of time the "wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9).

# THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

## *Christ, the great high priest*



From the moment of Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary until his Resurrection, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. In biblical language, he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and thus established by God the Father as our high priest. As Risen Lord, he remains our high priest. "He is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Heb 7:25-26). While all the baptized share in Christ's priesthood, the ministerial priesthood shares this through the Sacrament of Holy Orders in a special way.

## ***Holy Orders: Bishop, Priest and Deacon***

In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, there are three degrees or "orders": bishop, priest, and deacon. The rite of ordination is the sacramental act that makes this possible. Ordination "confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a 'sacred power' ...which can come only from Christ himself through the Church" (CCC, no. 1538). "The ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching (*munus docendi*), divine worship (*munus liturgicum*) and pastoral governance (*munus regendi*)" (CCC, no. 1592). Deacons in the Latin Church can baptize and witness the Sacrament of Marriage, as do priests and bishops. The ordained bishop and priest serve the Church in the person of Christ as head of the Body. "Through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers" (CCC, no. 1549). The Sacrament does not preserve the ordained from weakness and sin, but the Holy Spirit guarantees that the minister's sin does not impede the effectiveness of the Sacrament and its graces.

## ***The Liturgy of Ordination***

The essential rite of the sacrament of Holy Orders for all three degrees consists in the bishop's imposition of hands on the head of the ordinand and in the bishop's specific consecratory prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts proper to the ministry to which the candidate is being ordained. —CCC, no. 1573

**Bishops:** By ordination to the episcopacy, bishops receive the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and become successors of the Apostles. Through this Sacrament, a bishop belongs to the college of bishops and serves as the visible head or pastor of the local church entrusted to his care. As a college, the bishops have care and concern for the apostolic mission of all the churches in union with and under the authority of the Pope—the head of the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome, and the successor of St. Peter.

**Priests:** By ordination, “priests are united with the bishops in [priestly] dignity and at the same time depend on them in the exercise of their pastoral functions; they are called to be the bishops’ prudent co-workers” (CCC, no. 1595). With the bishop, priests form a presbyteral (priestly) community and assume with him the pastoral mission for a particular parish. The bishop appoints priests to the pastoral care of parishes and to other diocesan ministries. The priest promises obedience to the bishop in service to God’s people.

**Deacons:** The title deacon comes from the Greek word diakonia meaning “servant.” Through ordination the deacon is conformed to Christ, who came to serve, not to be served. In the Latin Church, deacons may baptize, proclaim the Gospel, preach the homily, assist the bishop or priest in the celebration of the Eucharist, assist at and bless marriages, and preside at funerals. They dedicate themselves to charitable endeavors, which was their ministerial role in New Testament times.

Only a baptized man may be ordained in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Jesus Christ chose men to become part of the Twelve. Throughout his ministry, his attitude toward women was different from the culture, and he courageously broke with it. For example, he did not hesitate to speak with the Samaritan woman even though custom forbade it (cf. Jn 4:4-42). But it was only men whom he chose to be the Twelve Apostles and the foundation of the ministerial priesthood. All candidates for ordination in the Latin Church—with the exception of permanent deacons, who can be married at the time of their ordination—are chosen from among those who intend to remain celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12). Their celibacy is a sign of their intention to imitate Christ’s own celibacy and to serve God in the Church’s ministry with an undivided heart. In some cases, married clergy of other Christian churches who convert to Catholicism have been admitted to Holy Orders.

### ***Effects of the Sacrament***

This Sacrament configures the bishop and priest to Christ as the Head of the Church in Christ’s threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. This Sacrament configures the deacon to Christ as servant. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, like that of Baptism and Confirmation, confers an indelible or permanent character on the recipient. This means that this Sacrament cannot be received again.

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to say that the priest acts in *persona Christi*, “in the person of Christ”?
2. Catholics believe only a woman and man may marry. “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Gn 1:27. Man and woman image the marriage of God and his people. John 3:28-29 Catholics also believe that only a man can be a sacramental image of the high priest, Jesus Christ. What do these two beliefs say about the sacramentality of the human body?
3. Do you think modern culture believes that our bodies mean anything beyond their usefulness to us?
4. How does the church’s belief in the sacramental nature of the body affect how we look at people in a vegetative state? Children with Down’s Syndrome? Aging bodies?
5. How does the modern, secular view of marriage and the family affect your own family relationships?
6. In what ways is your family a “domestic church”? How and when do you pray with your spouse? How and when do you pray as a family?
7. How does the discipline of Sunday mass attendance support the domestic church?
8. What role do you think our faith-filled witness to the ideal of a monogamous, permanent marriage play in our larger culture?
9. Why should couples be prepared for marriage? Why prepare a bishop, priest or deacon for holy orders?