



Rite for the Ordination to the Priesthood

BACKGROUND

Only a man who has already been ordained a deacon may be ordained to the priesthood. A man who is to be ordained a priest must be twenty-five years old. In the Roman Rite a man who is to be ordained a priest must normally promise to be celibate for the sake of the Kingdom.

The sacramental character that is conferred by ordination has three effects:

- It configures the ordained to the person of Christ.
- It distinguishes the ordained person from the other non-ordained persons among the People of God.
- Once validly conferred, the sacrament cannot be repeated.

Priests are not ordained for service to the universal Church at large, but only serve the universal Church in and through service to particular Churches in as much as the universal Church is formed in and from particular Churches. Once validly ordained, and with the faculties of the bishop, a priest may celebrate Mass, absolve sins in the sacrament of penance, baptize and anoint the sick.

The rite of ordination for priests takes place within Mass after the Liturgy of the Word readings.

It has the following structure:

Introductory Rites

Liturgy of the Word

Liturgy of Ordination

Election

Calling of Candidates

Presentation of Candidates

Election by the Bishop and Assent of the People

Homily

Promises of the Elect

Promise of Obedience

Litany of Supplication

Invitation to Prayer

Litany

Concluding Prayer

Laying on of Hands and Prayer of Ordination

Laying on of Hands

Prayer of Ordination

Explanatory Rites

Investiture with Stole and Chasuble

Anointing of Hands

Presentation of Bread and Wine

Kiss of Peace

Liturgy of Eucharist

Concluding Rite

Election:

After the Gospel, those to be ordained are called forward by a deacon. After they have all come forward, a priest who has been involved in their formation presents them to the Church and asks the bishop to ordain them. After inquiring if they are worthy to be ordained, the bishop accepts the request of the priest and the people show their consent by saying "Amen." It is common also to clap at this point.

Homily:

The instructional homily speaks about the nature of the priesthood according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. It speaks about how the work of Christ the teacher, priest and shepherd continues through the ministerial priesthood. It also states that priests are to be co-workers with the bishop, joined with him in the task of exercising the priestly office in service to the People of God. It reminds those to be ordained that they are to model their lives on the Good Shepherd "who came not to be served but to serve, and to seek out and save what was lost."

Promises:

There are five promises to be made by those who are to be ordained:

- Promise to discharge the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops.
- Promise to exercise the ministry of the Word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith.
- Promise to celebrate faithfully and reverently the mysteries of Christ handed down by the Church, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people.
- Promise to implore God's mercy upon the people entrusted to their care by observing the command to pray without ceasing.
- Promise to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice and to consecrate themselves to God for the salvation of all.

Promise of Obedience:

After they have made these promises, each one to be ordained goes before the bishop and makes a promise of obedience. As he does so, he kneels before the bishop and places his hands between those of the bishop. The bishop asks him: "Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?" The man to be ordained must answer yes to this question if he is to be ordained.

Litany of Supplication:

All of the candidates then lie prostrate on the floor and the Litany of the Saints is sung. This prayer asks for the intercession of the saints in order that God may look favorably upon those to be ordained. A prayer follows asking that the Holy Spirit may be poured upon them. While these prayers are being prayed, the faithful are to join their prayers for the candidates to those of the bishop.

Laying on of Hands:

The gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred upon those to be ordained by the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination. At the ordination of a priest, the ordaining bishop lays hands on each man to be ordained a priest. All of the priests who are present then lay hands on each candidate as well. This communal laying on of hands is to symbolize the fact that they are to be ordained into the presbyteral college of the local Church. The priests are to lay hands on these candidates in silence. This is in keeping with an ancient text found in the *Apostolic Tradition* which is believed to have been written by Hippolytus in 280 A.D.. He states that this common laying on of hands takes place at a priest's ordination, because "they all have a common and similar spirit."

Prayer of Ordination:

The bishop alone then says the prayer of ordination. It alludes to Aaron and the seventy elders called by Moses as Old Testament figures that prefigure the presbyters (priests) who will work as coworkers of the bishop. The prayer is directed to the Father, who by the power of the Holy Spirit provides for the various forms of ministry within the Church of Christ. After speaking of the various forms of ministry exercised within the Church, it states that the priests are those who assist the apostles in making Christ present in the Church today. It asks for the spirit of holiness for the new priests so that they may help to sanctify God's people. It also asks that they may be configured to Christ the priest and spotless victim. While this prayer is being prayed, the faithful are to join their prayers silently to those of the bishop. Once this prayer is concluded, the men being ordained are priests. The rites which follow are explanatory rites.

Investiture with Stole and Chasuble:

The first explanatory rite consists in the bestowal of the stole and chasuble upon the newly ordained. In most cases, the newly ordained entered the church wearing a stole tied at the side as for a deacon. It is now adjusted to be worn as proper for a priest, hanging down on both sides. Another priest assists in this and then helps the new priest to put on a chasuble. This is the proper vestment for a priest and bishop to wear for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is given to a priest because only he and a bishop may validly celebrate the Mass. He is to wear this whenever he presides at Mass.

Anointing of Hands:

The bishop now anoints the palms of each of the new priests. As he does so, he is to say: "The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit, guard and preserve you, that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifices to God." This anointing is a symbol of the anointing with the Holy Spirit which took place through the imposition of hands and the prayer of ordination. It also symbolizes the priest's distinctive participation in Christ's priesthood by the sacrifice he will offer with his hands.

Presentation of Bread and Wine:

The bread and the wine are the symbols of the priest's duty to offer the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist at Mass and to follow the example of Christ crucified. They are brought up by members of the assembly and presented to a deacon who takes them to the bishop. The bishop then presents them to each newly ordained priest saying: "Receive from the Holy People of God the gifts to be offered to God. Know what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross." This gesture ties the rite of ordination directly to the Eucharistic context and to the priest's service on behalf of the people of God.

Kiss of Peace:

The bishop and all of the priests present give the kiss of peace to the newly ordained priests. This is to seal their admittance to the rank of coworkers with the bishop and the other members of the local clergy who assist the bishop in his diocese. The other priests welcome the newly ordained as a fellow coworker in their shared ministry. This does not replace the rite of peace at Communion. It is at the ordinary rite of peace that peace is to be exchanged among all the members of the assembly.

The Mass now continues as usual. The newly ordained now serve as concelebrants with the bishop. This is the first Mass that they will celebrate.

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