

Sacrament of Holy Orders

Anyone can slay a dragon,
he told me, but try waking up
every morning & loving
the world all over again.

That's what takes a real hero.

– Story People

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Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

Discussion Question

1. What do you most value in the pastoral leader of your church community?
2. What do you believe should be the criteria for ministry? (ex: age, sex, education, etc.)
3. What do you see as the major issues facing the Sacrament of Holy Orders in the years to come?
4. What images/thoughts come to mind when you hear "the priest is Christ?" Is this easily misinterpreted?

Review

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

- Jesus is the foundation of the Sacraments
- Jesus instituted the church to carry on his mission ...
 - As the Father has sent me, so I send you.

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- Holy Orders
 - The Sacrament of pastoral leadership.
 - Before we can understand what it means to be called to the Catholic priesthood, we have to look at what Jesus' calling was.
 - But first we have to recapture the shock that the New Testament writers caused when they refer to Jesus as priest, prophet, and king!
 - The "story" of Jesus

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■ Recapturing the Shock

- Today we let “facts” about Jesus just roll off our tongues like there is nothing unusual about them ...
 - Christ the priest
 - Christ the prophet
 - Christ the king
 - Body and blood of Christ
- 1st Century Jews and gentiles would find these ideas shocking and outrageous. What do they mean?

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■ Recapturing the Shock

- The power of metaphor
 - “A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in “*a sea of troubles.*”
 - What was the early church community trying to say about Jesus when they called him a priest, prophet, and king?
 - We first have to understand what these words meant to 1st Century people.

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■ Priest, Prophet, and King

■ 1st Century Priest

- The priest was an intermediary between regular folks and God. They were responsible for implementing the rituals designed to re-establish the favorable relationship with God.

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Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

■ Priest, Prophet, and King

■ 1st Century Prophet

- Prophets speak for God. They are able to see the world in a way that is consistent with God's will. When the world is going in the wrong direction, their "job" is to call attention to it and warn (or encourage) people.

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■ Priest, Prophet, and King

■ 1st Century King

- On the positive side, kings are supposed to lead and protect people. Kings are usually all-powerful. The bad news for humans is that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This corruption resulted (and results) in many kings demanding much more than is reasonable from their subjects in order to support their lavish lifestyle.

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■ Priest, Prophet, and King

- What implicit comparison can we make between Christ and these titles?
 - Mushy applies here! Go too far with the metaphor and you'll turn it into something that doesn't make sense!

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■ Intermediary between us & God

- When we refer to Christ as priest, what images come to mind?
 - After all, that is the point of metaphor!
 - The whole point of Christ, then and now, is to bring people into relationship with God.
 - This is salvation. Christ does this perfectly.
 - Christ heals us
 - Through Christ we are able to achieve a depth of spiritual growth that is otherwise impossible. He helps us toward the goal of becoming “fully human,” where we are in communion with God always and do God's will perfectly.

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■ Intermediary between us & God

- Christ, then, is the perfect priest. He is the compassionate High Priest.

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■ Prophets speak for God

- Jesus was a different kind of preacher and teacher.
 - Rooted in the Old Testament
 - Preached a God of great compassion
 - Sought to bring people to God, to break down barriers between us and God.
 - He established the new covenant.
 - Love God with your whole heart and your neighbor as yourself
 - To live this covenant is to be redeemed (set free), to be liberated.

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■ Prophets speak for God

- Liberation is being grounded in a right relationship with God.
 - This does not confine our relationship with God to “God and me.”
 - To love God with one's whole heart is to love people as well ...
 - » To desire justice.
 - » To stand in solidarity with those disadvantaged by social structures.
 - » It is a “both and” relationship.

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■ Kings lead and protect

- How does Jesus lead and protect?
 - Gospel of John, Chapter 13



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■ Christ – Priest, Prophet and King

- Calling Jesus a priest, prophet and king tells us something profound about Christ.
 - The descriptions are not literal.
 - They do not accurately define Christ.
 - They provide a profound insight into Jesus.
 - And they also tell us something about the fullness of what it means to be a priest, prophet, or king.



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■ A people who image Christ

- Through our Baptism we are called:
 - To be a healing and reconciling people.
 - To teach/preach through word and example.
 - To servant leadership.
- We are called to do this:
 - At home
 - With parents, spouse, children, friends
 - At work
 - With those we work for, those that work for us, and those we work with.
 - At church
 - Through ministry and friendship

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■ A people who image Christ

- So as members of the Christian community, each one of us is called to be Christ.
- How do we become like Christ?

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■ How do we become like Christ?

- Through the church – the community of believers.
 - The work of leading people to God is a sacred responsibility:
 - It requires a deep commitment to Christ
 - It requires a deep commitment to Church (us)
 - The leadership of the Church comes from the Church – the Body of Christ.

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■ Church leadership

- The men who accept Church leadership
 - Take on a lifetime commitment
 - Undergo a lengthy formation period
 - Are expected to be excellent examples of Christians:
 - Loving relationship with God and the Church
 - Strong servant-leadership skills
 - Strong moral character
 - Strong spirituality
 - Good teacher in word and deed
 - Are expected to be celibate
 - except married Deacons

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■ Church leadership

- Men who have a calling to this ministry, complete the formation, and are accepted by the Church leadership are ordained to serve and lead the Church.
- Three ordained offices exist:
 - Bishop
 - Priest
 - Deacon

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■ Church leadership

- Bishops
 - Shepherds of the Church. They teach with the authority of the Church. Each is responsible for a diocese.
- Priest
 - Assistant and advisor to the Bishop. Often responsible for a parish. Carries out the work of the Bishop. A priest is an extension of the Bishop, carrying out his ministry.
- Deacon
 - Assistant to the Bishop. Often assigned to work with a parish priest.

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■ Church leadership

■ So how is Holy Orders a Sacrament?

■ Quick review of the Sacraments so far:

- The Sacraments of Initiation celebrate our dying to our old self and taking on a new life in Christ.
- Eucharist celebrates our discipleship, our membership in the Body of Christ, and our commitment to the new covenant in Christ.
- Marriage celebrates the profound love of husband and wife and the commitment to image the union of Christ and his church.

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■ Church leadership

■ So how is Holy Orders a Sacrament?

■ Holy Orders celebrates the commitment to:

- Lead the Church as Christ leads the Church
 - Act in the person of Christ within the Body of Christ.
- ##### ■ So in a profound, metaphorical way, the Catholic priest *is* Christ – priest, prophet and king.