

05. The Kingly Ministry of Jesus as lived by the Ordained



The members of the Christian community who receive the sacrament of Orders are consecrated by a special grace to be in the Church **a sacrament of Christ precisely as Head of the Body.**

Christ is the head of the body because he is its inspirer. He wills to draw everyone to himself (John 12:32) in order that we may 'live and live to the full' (John 10:10), by sharing in the communion of love which he has in God.

'By the sacrament of Order, presbyters are configured to Christ the priest as servants of the Head. They must be prepared to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ who gives them life and guidance' (PO n. 12).

When an ordained priest mediates God's word to an individual or group or community in his role as priest, he is doing so precisely as a sacrament of Christ-as-Head.

The word coming from the risen Christ, besides revealing who God is and how God has chosen to relate to us, is also a word that guides us as to how we should respond.

This directing word also is mediated to the Christian community especially through those who are ordained to leadership of that community.

The leadership exercised by the ordained minister relates to the Body as such and is a sacrament of the leadership of the Body exercised by Christ the Head. The ordained minister is a sacrament of Christ directing the community to do God's will.

Organisational leadership – leadership in the ‘ordering’ of the community. Of course, with this ministry as with all the other ministries, the one entrusted with it carries it out best when he does so in love.

The ordained minister is to carry out his ministry of leadership of the community with the mind and heart of Jesus, as a service to Christ’s Body the Church.

An ordained priest, because he shares in the priesthood of Christ is called to be a sacrament of Christ's priestly mediation of God's will to the Church assembled.

- leading • directing • governing • shepherding

'The bishops have the ministry of discernment and harmony, which involves an abundance of special gifts of the Holy Spirit and the distinctive charisms of ordering the various roles in intimate docility of mind to the one and only life-giving Spirit' (Mutual Relations between bishops and religious 1978).

The evidence of the New Testament and historical studies of the first and second centuries of the Christian era indicate that Christian communities were, from the beginning, structured and organised in a variety of ways. However, influenced by the organisation of the Roman state and by the needs of the times, some time in the second century the system of mono-episcopacy emerged as the universal pattern of government.

As church order developed, the task of organisational leadership fell to the bishops, assisted by presbyters and deacons. The bishops are successors of the apostles, not individually, but by being constituted members of the episcopal body (CD, n.4). This body carries on certain aspects of the apostolic ministry. Presbyters, to a lesser degree, share in this.

According to this system, the local Christian community was under the leadership of one bishop who was assisted by a number of presbyters and deacons.

This system still prevails in the Catholic Church in communion with Rome, in the various Orthodox churches, and in a number of other Christian churches.

‘The expression of the gift of the Spirit, whereby the Church’s pastors serve the community of believers by discerning what the Spirit is saying to the whole Church, calling it to a witness and life which is a faithful expression of the unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of human history’ (John Thornhill SM).

‘The sacrament of Orders is intended to give to the Church the pastors who, besides being teachers and guides, are called to be witnesses and workers for unity, builders of the family of God, and builders and preservers of the communion of this family against the sources of division and dispersion’ (John-Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance 1984 n.27)

The sacrament of orders bestows on certain baptised members of the church a special grace and a special ‘character’ that make them instruments of Christ as Head of his Body, the Church.

‘They are to be dedicated to promoting the interests of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the People of God, through their free and well-ordered efforts towards a common goal, may attain to salvation’ (Vatican II LG 18).

‘The pastor’s task extends to the formation of a genuine Christian community’ (Vatican II PO 6).

God wants ‘everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:4).

‘In what is doubtful, freedom; in what is necessary, unity; in all things, charity’ (John-Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance 1984 n.9)

‘While testing the spirits if they be of God, they must discover with faith, recognise with joy and foster with diligence the many and varied charismatic gifts of the people ... bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody feels a stranger in the Christian community’ (Vatican II PO 9).

Vatican II PO 12

‘Priests must be prepared to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ who gives them life and guidance.’

Vatican II LG 12

‘Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and the proper use of the gifts through their office, “not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and to hold fast to what is good.’

The ordained minister is to help make the faithful aware of their role, as baptised Christians, to be sacraments of Christ the King, allowing the Spirit of the risen Christ to inspire them to contribute to bringing about the reign of God in the world.

This role includes the mediation of commanding, discerning, directing and governing. Various dimension of this role are highlighted in the following texts from the New Testament:

‘This is how one should regard us, as personal servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God’ (1 Corinthians 4:1).

‘The Lord’s slave must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, able to teach, forbearing, correcting with gentleness those who oppose the truth. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth’ (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

‘Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock will follow’ (1 Peter 5:3).

‘Obey your leaders and be submissive, for they are vigilant for your souls, as ones who will have to give account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighs’ (Hebrews.13:17).

‘The hierarchy make wise laws in docile response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit [and exercise a supervisory and protective authority’ (LG, n. 45).

‘The pastor’s task extends to the formation of a genuine Christian community’ (PO, n. 6).

‘It is for the pastors to pass judgment on the authenticity and good use of the gifts of the faithful, not, certainly, with a view to quenching the Spirit, but to testing everything and keeping what is good’ (AA, n. 3. See also LG, n. 12).

‘The holders of office ... are dedicated to promoting the interest of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the people of God may, through their free and well-ordered efforts towards a common goal, attain to salvation’ (LG, n. 18).

‘While testing the spirits if they be of God, they must discover with faith, recognise with joy, and foster with diligence, the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity ... bringing about agreement among divergent outlooks in such a way that nobody may feel a stranger in the Christian community ... (They are to be) defenders of the common good’ (PO, n.9).

John-Paul II Reconciliation and Penance in the mission of the Church today (1984):

‘The sacrament of Orders is intended to give to the Church pastors who, besides being teachers and guides, are called to be witnesses and workers for unity, builders of the family of God, and builders and preservers of the communion of this family against the sources of division and dispersion’ (n.27).

The Ordained Minister will need to be sufficiently integrated to be able to focus upon others without his own agenda dominating, and have the ability to listen and to relate to people in an attractive and liberating way.

The power to command is dangerous when exercised by one who has not learned to obey.

Teresa of Avila represents every Christian teacher when she writes: 'In perfect conformity to God's will lies all our good' (Interior Castle, II, I, 8). Doing God's will means 'seeking him with all our hearts'. God does not want us to obey blindly or automatically, without engaging our heart.

God does not command from the outside as it were. God speaks also to our heart and he wants our obedience to come from our heart. This is what we mean by conscience: an attentive listening to the movements of our heart that are inspired by God.

If we are attentive to our heart and listen to the directions of God that are picked up by our conscience, and if we humbly and faithfully respond to these inspirations from our heart, we are promised a special blessedness.



Here I am Lord

Text based on Isaiah 6

Words and Music Dan Schutte

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I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.



I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?



Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.



I the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.



Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?



Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.