

## **Priesthood, Presbyterate**

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The COVID-19 pandemic caused a two-month delay to our ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood. Because we observed social spacing and other precautions on August 1st, the number of in-church participants was limited. This resulted in extra effort to record and livestream the Mass. For many who have not attended an Ordination Mass, there may be several parts that are quite striking.

Candidates respond to a number of ritual questions to indicate their readiness and willingness. Deacon candidates publicly commit to lifelong celibacy. Whether becoming a deacon or a priest, each man steps forward and kneels in front of the seated bishop. Then, putting his folded hands into the bishop's hands, the bishop asks him, "Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?" He says "I do" at both ordination to deacon and again at ordination to priest.

At the appropriate moment, each man steps forward for the bishop to lay hands atop the man's head. This ancient gesture hearkens back to the New Testament times. After this, vested priests in attendance come forward as each imposes hands. Paragraph 1568 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), second edition, cites the Vatican II document on priests: "All priests, who are constituted in the order of priesthood by the sacrament of Order, are bound together by an intimate sacramental brotherhood, but in a special way they form one priestly body in the diocese to which they are attached under their own bishop...' The unity of the presbyterium finds liturgical expression in the custom of the presbyters' imposing hands, after the bishop, during the rite of ordination."

See also Paragraphs 1576, and also 1595 which notes that priests "form around their bishop the presbyterium which bears responsibility with him for the particular Church [that is, diocese]."

The consecratory prayers of ordination for deacons or priests are lengthy and prescribed exactly. For priests, the bishop says, in part: "We beseech you, Lord, in our weakness, to grant us this helper that we need... Grant, we pray, Almighty Father, to this your servant the dignity of the Priesthood... may he henceforth possess this office, which comes from you, O God, and is next in rank to the office of Bishop..."

Two things are clear in these teachings. First, there is a priestly bond to the bishop, and obedience and respect are in service to the mission. Obedience has both broad and specific meanings that are sketched under its entry in the CCC glossary. In one broad sense, obedience is a two-way street. Bishops and priests must commit to listening to each other in mission related matters as well as things associated with personal well-being. As in every human connection, listening is not always the same as acquiescence or agreement. Second, a diocesan priest is ordained into a Presbyterate that is responsible for the welfare of an entire diocese, not simply to one parish or administrative role. Often when there is parish consternation over priest reassignments, there is a lack of understanding about that to which a priest has promised himself. Furthermore, where a priest's care for the entire good of the Church is implied in his promises, now and then one is called to be a bishop in a role that he had never imagined.

I am grateful that we were able to celebrate our ordinations with more than a few people present. I am thankful for the men who are dedicating their lives to Christ in the Church. And I am profoundly

appreciative of the families which have allowed and encouraged their sons to even consider a vocation to ordained priesthood.