

TREASURES of OUR FAITH

by: Deacon Ryan Adams

Greetings brothers and sisters. As we go through this 'Year of Faith', each week we will take a journey together to deepen and rediscover our faith as Catholic Christians. We will take time to look at the rich traditions of our Church, we'll look at what certain things signify and their symbolism, take time to answer some frequently asked questions and look at why we do certain things as Catholics. This week we'll look at the three stages of Holy Orders.

The first is that which Christ Himself bestowed upon His Apostles: the episcopate. A bishop is a man who is ordained to the episcopate by another bishop. He stands in a direct, unbroken line from the Apostles, known as "apostolic succession." Ordination as a bishop confers the grace to sanctify others, as well as the authority to teach the faithful. Because of this great responsibility, all episcopal ordinations must be approved by the Pope.

The second level of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the priesthood. No bishop can minister to all of the faithful in his diocese, so priests act, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, as "co-workers of the bishops." The Priest is consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. Just some of the chief duties of the priesthood are in the consecration and offering of the Eucharist in the Mass to the faithful as well as in the forgiving of sins through the sacrament of reconciliation.

The third level of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the diaconate. Deacons share in Christ's mission in a special way, the sacrament of Holy Orders marks them with a "character" which configures them to Christ; Christ made himself the servant of all, deacons are ordained to be of service to the community. Among other tasks, it is the role of deacons to assist the bishop and priests in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, in the distribution of Holy Communion, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching the Good News, in presiding over funeral vigils and graveside committals, and in dedicating themselves to the various ministries of charity in the community.

Each level of ordination confers special graces, from the ability to proclaim and preach granted to deacons; to the ability to act in the person of Christ to offer the Mass granted to priests; to a special grace of strength to lead, granted to bishops, which allows them to teach and lead their flocks.