

Sent by God

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Jesus sent his apostles to continue his ministry.

Before returning to heaven, Jesus commanded the apostles, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." He entrusts the apostles with his divine authority and sends them forth to continue his ministry, promising to be with them until the end of time. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Through these shepherds, Jesus continued to care for his flock.

Although the apostles were imperfect instruments, with sins and weaknesses, Jesus worked through them to build the early Church. They preached the Gospel, baptized thousands of new believers, healed many who were sick, and authoritatively taught in Christ's name when doctrinal controversies threatened the Church's unity.

The apostles passed on their authority to new leaders.

As Christianity spread, the apostles chose leaders to continue their ministry. These leaders were called bishops, meaning "overseer." Through the laying on of hands, the apostles passed to these bishops the authority they had received from Jesus. The bishops, in turn, chose respected men in their communities to assist them as presbyters (later translated as priests), giving them authority for their roles through the laying on of hands. For example, Paul made Timothy a bishop through the laying on of hands (2 Tim 1:5) and directed Titus to appoint presbyters in the same manner. (Titus 1:5)

We now call this gift the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Through this sacrament, Jesus provides his flock with shepherds in each generation. Holy Orders is received in a ceremony called an ordination, where a bishop lays hands on each candidate's head and asks God to bestow the Holy Spirit upon him. In this way, the bishop passes on the authority that he himself received through Holy Orders, in a succession stretching all the way back through the centuries to the apostles and Jesus himself.

Jesus still serves us through his shepherds today.

A priest is meant to be a spiritual father to his people, serving them with a heart like the Lord's. This is a difficult calling, as he is a sinner in need of God's mercy, like each of us. Through Holy Orders, Jesus offers each priest special graces to live out his calling faithfully, similar to the way he helps married couples live out their marital covenant through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Priests are meant to reflect the Lord's love for us.

If priests live out their calling worthily and faithfully, Jesus can work through them in beautiful ways to continue his ministry in our midst, just as he did two thousand years ago. Through his shepherds, Jesus desires to wash us clean in Baptism, strengthen us with the Gospel, feed us with the Bread of Life, forgive our sins, give us healing, and lead us one day to heaven.

