

## **Homily on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ**

*We all participate in the priesthood of Christ.*

My friends, today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This sacrament is the church's sacrament *par excellence*, and we partake of it because we are a priestly people, rendered as such through baptism. What is stated in the refrain from our Responsorial Psalm 110, "You are a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek," applies to all of us in our own ways. This is because through baptism and confirmation we are all consecrated into the priesthood of Christ, and some of us enter into the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood as bishops, priests, or assisting deacons, through Holy Orders.

What are Holy Orders, and why do they matter? According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Holy Orders is the "sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate" (CCC 1536). Let us consider this incredible claim for a moment. Though we all participate in Christ's priesthood, Holy Orders represents the very means through which his mission is perpetuated for all time. In other words, without this sacrament, Christ's mission would not continue.

Was ordination always this important? What does the Old Testament have to say about priesthood? Our first reading from Genesis has the priest Melchizedek blessing Abram even before he was known as Abraham, which shows the significance of priesthood at the root of our overarching tradition. The priesthood of the Old Covenant grew from this Abrahamic seed, and even though the chosen people was an entire "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6; cf. Isa 61:6), the tribe of Levi was chosen specifically from the twelve tribes for liturgical service,

with God himself as their inheritance (CCC 1539). “Appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God,” and “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (CCC 1539), we can see that priests have always had a special role in salvation history.

As many of you know, I was ordained a priest on June 23, 2019, which was the very date of this Solemnity that year. Because of this “anniversary,” I cannot help but reflect on what Holy Orders means to me personally. Even before I was Catholic, a major reason I converted was Holy Orders. This was because I had done some reading and reflecting, and understood that ordained priesthood itself exists in the context of the universal priesthood of the faithful. We are all called to build up the Body of Christ, and some are called to priesthood specifically. I did feel called, and at the same time I knew that it was necessary to be open to God. A key turning point in my discernment that ultimately freed me up to enter seminary came in the form of detachment. That is, I realized that it is not about priests, but priesthood itself. No matter what God called me to, be it as anything from a monk to a married man, I would be partaking in this ministry anyway. It was just a matter of allowing the clarity of an authentic response to God to reveal how this priesthood would manifest itself, which in my case did lead to ordination.

Having taken Holy Orders, I can attest that there is no better feeling of completeness in the world. Not that only priests enjoy such a feeling – it is just that when we are doing what we are most meant to do in this life, and being who we are most meant to become because God has brought us into right relationship with him, we know the joy of having been integrated into the Body of Christ in the fullest sense. In other words, we become “wholly ordered” and one in God.

To be ordered is what ordination is all about. In ancient Rome, the word “order” meant an established civil body, particularly related to the government (CCC 1537). In early

Christianity, being brought into any number of bodies in the church, be it the orders not only of bishops, priests, and deacons, but also catechumens, virgins, spouses, and widows, was accomplished through a rite called “ordinatio,” or ordination (CCC 1537). Even though in the church we now understand ordination *per se* exclusively in the context of Holy Orders, that does not change the reason for why Holy Orders matters. This sacrament is important not only because it is the means through which Christ’s mission continues, but also because it serves as a basis for how we are a priestly, prophetic, and kingly people. From Melchizedek to Abram, Christ to his apostles, and our bishops to all of us today be it through baptism and confirmation, or Holy Orders specifically, God has chosen Holy Orders to perpetuate his plan of salvation.

With this background in mind, I invite all of you to do the following in your prayer lives this week. Ask God how is he is making you holy and ordered. How are you “wholly ordered?” After meditating on this question, you will find that gradually a sense of how you specifically fit into the church will reveal itself. This prayer will possibly result in affirmation about your life as it is, but not without challenging you to take on your own participation in priestly ministry. We all participate in the priesthood of Christ, so let us prepare ourselves to receive his Body and Blood with awe in our hearts as his “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6; cf. Isa 61:6), and let us conduct ourselves accordingly as People of God.