

LEX ORANDI, LEX SERVIENDI

ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF ORDAINED MINISTRY IN SELECT TEXTS FROM THE RITES OF ORDINATION

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Abstract

This article will explore the understanding of ordained ministry within the Roman Catholic Church. The article proceeds by examining the prayer and homily from the rites of ordination for Bishops, Priests, and Deacons in order to observe the biblical foundations of ordained ministry, the role of ordained ministry within salvation history, the functional and ontological dimensions of ordained ministry, the living out of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and the role of the Holy Spirit in ordained ministry.

Introduction

One of the important tenets of recent Roman Catholic liturgical theology is the principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*.¹ This adage, whose origin can be traced back to Prosper of Aquitaine in the fifth century, can be loosely translated as, “The law of praying [is] the law of believing.” Since the time of the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962–1965), the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* has contributed to a fuller appreciation of the theological meaning and significance of the liturgical rites by which the Christian faithful are sanctified by God and offer themselves as a spiritual worship to God (cf. Rom 12:1).²

More recently, some liturgical theologians have expanded the expression *lex orandi, lex credendi* to include a third element, *lex vivendi*, or “the law of living.”³ This extension is meant to highlight the intrinsic connection between what the faithful pray,

¹ For a recent and thorough discussion of this principle and its application in the revised rites after Vatican II, see Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: A Method for Liturgical Theology*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 3–60.

² For two examples of this, see Aidan Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984); and David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2004).

³ Irwin, *Context and Text*, 81.

believe, and live out. In the spirit of that fuller recognition of the links between worship, belief, and life, this article will examine certain texts from the rites of ordination currently in use in the Roman Catholic Church, in order to enumerate some aspects of current Roman Catholic theology of ordained ministry, or what can be called the *lex serviendi* or “the law of serving.”

The rites of ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons⁴ are rich and complex liturgical celebrations, containing both ancient elements and recent adaptations.⁵ Because these liturgical rites contain so much material that is theologically significant, this article will limit itself to examining and commenting on two elements contained in each of these rites: 1) the model homily and 2) the prayer of ordination. These liturgical texts are particularly important for understanding the nature and purpose of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church.

Following the structure of *De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum*⁶ (*Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons*), the texts from the rite of ordination of a Bishop will be examined first, followed by those from the rite of ordination of Priests, and then the texts from the rite of ordination of Deacons. After the examination of all these texts, five brief observations will be offered on the theology of ordained ministry that emerges from them. These observations will consider the biblical foundations of ordained ministry, the role of ordained ministry within salvation history, the functional and ontological dimensions of ordained ministry, the living out of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and the role of the Holy Spirit in ordained ministry.

The Rite of Ordination of a Bishop

The Homily

The ritual for the ordination of a Bishop indicates that, immediately after the proclamation of the Gospel, which “constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the

⁴ In order to be consistent with the current official English editions of liturgical books, references to Bishops, Priests, and Deacons will be capitalized. Also, the Latin edition of the ritual uses the term “presbyteri” (presbyters) in reference to the second rank of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, while the current official English translations uses the term “Priests.” Accordingly, this article will use the term “Priest(s),” rather than “Presbyter(s).”

⁵ Antonio Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti, vol. 6, Ordine* (Rome: Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, 2010), 111–248. English translations are mine.

⁶ *De Ordinatione Episcopi, Presbyterorum et Diaconorum, editio typica altera* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989). English translations from *Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons* (Washington: USCCB Publishing, 2021). Hereafter, *OBPD*. When referencing ritual books, the citations given refer to paragraph or section numbers, rather than page numbers.

Word,”⁷ the hymn *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, or another suitable hymn, is sung.⁸ Then the candidate to be ordained Bishop (Bishop-elect) is presented to the ordaining Bishop. The ordaining Bishop then asks that the mandate from the Apostolic See authorizing the ordination be read. After the reading, all the assembled give their assent to the ordination of the Bishop-elect.⁹

It is then that the ordaining Bishop preaches the homily. Basing himself on the readings from Scripture that have already been proclaimed, the ordaining Bishop may preach a homily that he has composed, he may use the model homily included in the ritual book, or he may combine parts of the model homily with his own words.¹⁰

The model homily proposed (see Appendix One¹¹) is inspired by the teaching on the episcopate proposed in paragraphs 19–27 of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council.¹² The homily is presented in six paragraphs, each developing some aspect of the nature and purpose of episcopal ministry.

The first paragraph grounds episcopal ministry in the ministry of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the mission of the apostles. It states that the purpose of the apostles’ ministry was the preaching of the Gospel and the gathering of all into one flock, whom they were to sanctify and govern. The apostles chose successors to continue their ministry, laying hands on them so that they might also receive the gift of the Spirit. Through this gift of the Holy Spirit, Bishops receive “the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.”

The second paragraph indicates that, through the person and ministry of the Bishop, surrounded by his Priests, Christ himself is present to the faithful, continually proclaiming the gospel, administering the sacraments, gathering new members, and leading the faithful on their pilgrim journey to the Kingdom. The third paragraph encourages the faithful to receive and honor the Bishop-elect “as a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God.” The task entrusted to the new Bishop is described as “bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel and the ministry of the Spirit and of justice.”

In the fourth paragraph, the ordaining Bishop directly addresses the Bishop-elect, reminding him that he has been chosen by the Lord, in order to act on behalf of human beings “in those things that pertain to God.” He goes on to say, “For the title of Bishop

⁷ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 60.

⁸ *OBDP*, 35.

⁹ *OBDP*, 38.

¹⁰ *OBDP*, 39.

¹¹ *OBDP*, 39. In each section, the citation from *OBDP* will be footnoted in the reference to the corresponding appendix only. To avoid unnecessary repetition, quotations from the same reference in a particular section will be marked with quotations marks, but they will not include a separate footnote.

¹² Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 128–29.

signifies a task, not an honor; a Bishop must strive to benefit others rather than to lord it over them.” In the fifth paragraph, the ordaining Bishop exhorts the Bishop-elect to “be a faithful steward, moderator, and guardian of the mysteries of Christ.” The Bishop-elect is also urged to “be mindful always of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and is known by them, and who did not hesitate to lay down his life for them.”

In the sixth paragraph of the homily, the Bishop-elect is exhorted to have the love of a father and brother for “all those whom God places in [his] care,” especially Priests and Deacons, who are his “co-workers in the ministry of Christ.” In addition, he should have a special love for the most vulnerable, should collaborate with all the faithful, and should care “for those who are not yet gathered into the one fold of Christ.” He is reminded that as a member of the College of Bishops, he should have a concern for all the Churches and for “the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit places [him] to govern the Church of God.” He is to do this “in the name of the Father whose image [he] represent[s] in the Church; and in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, whose office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd [he] will discharge, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who enlivens the Church of Christ and, by his power, strengthens us in our weakness.”

The Prayer of Ordination

The General Introduction of *Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons* states, “Sacred Ordination is conferred by the Bishop’s laying on of hands and the Prayer of Ordination by which the Bishop blesses God and calls upon the gift of the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of ministry.”¹³ As a result, the Prayer of Ordination is theologically significant for understanding the nature and purpose of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church.

After the homily, the Bishop-elect makes a series of promises with regard to the ministry he is about to assume. The ordaining Bishop then leads all those gathered in the Litany of Supplication, praying for an outpouring of God’s grace on the Bishop-elect. The litany concludes with a prayer offered by the ordaining Bishop. Then the Bishop-elect kneels and all the Bishops present lay hands, one by one, without saying anything. When the laying of hands is concluded, two Deacons hold an open Book of the Gospels over the head of the Bishop-elect.¹⁴

Then, with all Bishops standing near the ordaining Bishop, the latter extends his hands and says or sings the Prayer of Ordination (see Appendix Two¹⁵). The current Prayer of Ordination is based on the very ancient prayer of ordination contained in the

¹³ *OBPD*, 6.

¹⁴ *OBPD*, 40–46.

¹⁵ *OBPD*, 47.

Traditio Apostolica, with some minor stylistic changes.¹⁶ The structure of the prayer is that of invocation, anamnesis, epiclesis, and doxology, which is typical of important liturgical prayers.¹⁷

The prayer begins with the invocation of God the Father, “amplified by two appositions and two relative clauses.”¹⁸ The amplifications are all taken from Old and New Testament texts and make general references to the attributes of God. The invocation grounds the entire prayer in the revelation of the mystery of God and of his salvific will. The invocation is further amplified and concretized by the anamnesis, which, in five subordinate clauses, recalls specific events in salvation history in which God provided for the needs of his people through ministers.

Then the ordaining Bishop, together with the other Bishops present, says the epiclesis of the prayer. They ask that God “pour forth upon this chosen one the power that is from you, the governing Spirit, whom you gave to your beloved Son Jesus Christ and whom he gave to the holy Apostles, who established the Church in each place as your sanctuary, to the glory and unfailing praise of your name.” These words are essential for the validity of the ordination and highlight that the ministry of the new Bishop is grounded in the Spirit given to Christ and the Apostles. What is asked of God in these words is the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Bishop-elect.¹⁹

The epiclesis continues with a series of intercessions, which the ordaining Bishop alone says. These intercessions ask for the grace necessary for the new Bishop to exercise faithfully the various aspects of episcopal ministry. These aspects include nourishing God’s flock and the exercise of the High Priesthood without reproach, exercising his new authority with meekness and purity of heart.

The whole prayer ends with a doxology, asking that all that has been asked of God the Father may be brought about through Christ and “with the Holy Spirit in the holy Church.” That last part highlights what had been mentioned in the homily, namely, that the ordination is not for the sake or honor of the new Bishop, but for the good of the Church and the glory of God.²⁰

¹⁶ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 140–41.

¹⁷ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 142.

¹⁸ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 143.

¹⁹ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 146.

²⁰ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 151.

The Rite of Ordination of Priests

The Homily

The ritual for the ordination of Priests indicates that, immediately after the proclamation of the Gospel, the candidates be presented to the ordaining Bishop. The ordaining Bishop then asks that testimony be offered regarding the worthiness of the candidates, and a Priest offers the necessary testimony. The Bishop then accepts the testimony and chooses the candidates for ordination. All the assembled then give their assent to the ordination of the candidates.²¹

As was the case with the rite of ordination for a Bishop, the ordaining Bishop then preaches the homily, either of his own composition, the model one offered in the ritual book, or a combination of the two. The model homily (see Appendix Three²²) includes themes and expressions taken from *Lumen Gentium*, 28, as well as the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, on the ministry and life of Priests, of the Second Vatican Council.²³ It is presented in nine paragraphs, which highlight various aspects of priestly ministry.

The model homily “first affirms the common royal priesthood of all the baptized people of God, relying on 1 Peter 2:9,”²⁴ but then affirms that “our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, chose certain disciples to exercise in his name” the priestly office in the Church. This refers above all to Bishops, who share in Christ’s office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd, but that “Priests are established as co-workers of the Order of Bishops with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the People of God.”

In the third paragraph, the homily explains that the candidates are “to be ordained to the Priesthood in the Order of the Presbyterate,” and that “[b]y the priestly ministry, [Christ’s] Body, that is the Church, is built up and grows into a holy temple, the People of God.” The next paragraph indicates that, through ordination, the candidates will “be configured to Christ the eternal High Priest and joined to the Priesthood of the Bishops,” as Priests of the New Testament. As such, they will have the responsibility of preaching the Gospel, shepherding God’s people, and celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments.²⁵

²¹ *OBPD*, 121–22.

²² *OBPD*, 123.

²³ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 184.

²⁴ Paul Turner, *Present for God’s Call: An Overview of the Rites of Institution and Ordination* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2023), 174.

²⁵ *OBPD*, 123.

As was the case with the homily for the ordination of a Bishop, the ordaining Bishop then addresses the candidates directly. In this case, the Bishop explains how, in Christ, they will exercise the office of teaching, sanctifying, and governing. In each case, the candidates are exhorted to draw ever closer to God and to exercise these functions for the good of the People of God. They are urged to meditate constantly on God's Word, so as to "believe what [they] read, teach what [they] believe, and practice what [they] teach." In addition, in celebrating the sacred mysteries, they are to strive to understand what they do and to imitate what they celebrate, striving "to put to death whatever is sinful within [them] and to walk in newness of life." Finally, they are urged "to gather the faithful together into one family, so that [they] may lead them to God the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit," always following the example of the Good Shepherd.

The Prayer of Ordination

As was the case in the ordination of a Bishop, after the homily, the candidates to be ordained Priests make a series of promises regarding the ministry they are about to assume. The ordaining Bishop then leads all those gathered in the Litany of Supplication, praying for an outpouring of God's grace on the men to be ordained. The litany concludes with a prayer offered by the ordaining Bishop. Since the essential elements for the valid conferral of the Sacrament of Holy Orders are the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination, the ordaining Bishop lays hands on each of the candidates in silence, followed by the Priests present, who also lay hands on the candidates in silence.

Then the ordaining Bishop, with the Priests standing alongside him, prays the Prayer of Ordination (see Appendix Four²⁶) with outstretched hands.²⁷ The text of the prayer is substantially the same as has been used in the Roman Church since ancient times, with the only modification being the addition of a request that their preaching may reach the ends of the earth.²⁸ The prayer "relies heavily on biblical testimony"²⁹ regarding the role of Priests and is structured in four sections: an invocation, an anamnesis, an epiclesis, and a doxology.

The prayer begins by asking the Father to draw near and then refers to certain attributes of God. It mentions that God, "by the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to form a priestly people, establish[ed] among them ministers of Christ [his] Son in various orders." It then proceeds to the anamnesis, recalling God's action in the Old

²⁶ *OBPD*, 131.

²⁷ *OBPD*, 130.

²⁸ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 200.

²⁹ Turner, *Present for God's Call*, 181.

Testament, including the appointing of Moses and Aaron, the sending of the Spirit on seventy elders to help Moses in his ministry, and the establishment of the Levitical priesthood.

The anamnesis then moves from consideration of priesthood in the Old Testament to that of the New Testament. It recalls, first of all, the sending of Jesus into the world as “Apostle and High Priest of our confession,” who, “[t]hrough the Holy Spirit, [. . .] offered himself unblemished to [the Father] and made his Apostles [. . .] sharers in his mission.” The prayer then speaks of “companions” whom God gave to the apostles “to proclaim and carry out the work of salvation through all the world.”

Then, as Paul Turner explains, “the bishop moves to the purpose of his prayer. Having recalled how God has appointed leaders in both Old and New Testaments, the bishop turns his attention to contemporary needs. As Moses in his weakness required helpers, so does the Church today.”³⁰ The bishop prays the sacramental formula, which is essential for a valid ordination: “Grant, we pray, almighty Father, to these your servants, the dignity of the Priesthood; renew deep within them the Spirit of Holiness; may they hold the office second in order, received from you, O God, and by the example of their manner of life may they inspire right conduct.” Miralles notes that “the fact that in the anamnesis the action of the Spirit in the sacrifice of the Cross is recalled makes the epiclesis more meaningful: the Holy Spirit will make the elected participants in the priesthood of Christ exercised on Golgotha.”³¹

The last part of the sacramental formulas leads directly to the next part of the prayer, which describes the various ministerial functions of Priests.³² They are called to be co-workers of Bishops in preaching, guided by “the grace of the Holy Spirit.” Together with Bishops, they are to be “faithful stewards of [God’s] mysteries,” so that the faithful may be renewed by Baptism, refreshed by the Eucharist, reconciled through Penance, and raised up through the Anointing of the Sick. Furthermore, they are to join Bishops in “imploing [God’s] mercy for the people entrusted to them and for the whole world.”

Before concluding the prayer of ordination, the Bishop indicates that “if God grants this prayer, all the nations may become one people in Christ, a hope that Paul articulated in Romans 11:25.”³³ Finally, the Bishop offers a Trinitarian doxology that highlights the mediation of Christ.³⁴

³⁰ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 182.

³¹ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 207.

³² Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 207.

³³ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 182.

³⁴ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 209.

The Rite of Ordination of Deacons

The Homily

After the proclamation of the Gospel, the rite of ordination of Deacons proceeds similarly as that of Priests, with the presentation of the candidates to the ordaining Bishop, the asking for and giving of testimony regarding the worthiness of the candidates, and the election of the candidates by the Bishop and the assent of the assembly.³⁵ The ordaining Bishop then preaches the homily, which, as was the case in the two rites already examined, he can compose himself, avail himself of the model homily (see Appendix Five³⁶) included in the ritual book, or he can combine parts of the model homily with his own words.

The model homily contained in the ritual book has characteristics similar to those for the ordination of a Bishop and of Priests, with the exception that the one for Deacons also takes into account that some men ordained Deacons are married, while others commit themselves to celibacy.³⁷ The homily begins with six paragraphs that are applicable to all ordinations of Deacons, then provides three alternative conclusions, depending on whether the group of ordinands includes married and unmarried men, only unmarried men, or only married men.

The homily begins by greeting those present and inviting all to “consider carefully the nature of the ministerial rank to which [the elect] shall be raised.” It then “assures all that the Holy Spirit will strengthen these candidates.”³⁸ The homily then says that Deacons “help the Bishop and his Priests in the ministries of the word, of the altar, and of charity, showing themselves to be servants of all.” It then expands on the three-fold ministry of word, altar, and charity.

In describing the ministry of the altar, the homily outlines the principal roles of Deacons in the celebration of the Eucharist. Turner observes, “The bishop probably explains [service at Mass] first because the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.”³⁹ In the next paragraph, the homily explains that “[a]t the Bishop’s direction it will be [the Deacons’] duty to exhort believers and unbelievers alike and instruct them in holy doctrine.” Another part of their ministry of the word is “to preside over public prayer, administer Baptism, assist at and bless Marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, and conduct funeral rites.” While some of these latter functions are connected to the liturgy and the ministry of the altar, the homily “envisions ministry

³⁵ *OBPD*, 197–98.

³⁶ *OBPD*, 199.

³⁷ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 224.

³⁸ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 126.

³⁹ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 127.

of the Word through instruction and through serving as a leader of prayer outside the celebration of Mass.”⁴⁰

The next paragraph focuses on the Deacons’ ministry of charity. It begins by asserting that “Deacons derive this consecrated mission of charity directly from the same imposition of hands that binds them more closely to the altar.”⁴¹ It goes on to say that “they will carry out a ministry of charity in the name of the Bishop or pastor.” It calls on the candidates to carry out the ministry of charity “in such a way that [others] recognize them as disciples of him who did not come to be served but to serve.”

The next two paragraphs elaborate on the idea of the example of the Lord Jesus as essential for diaconal ministry. The Bishop, directly addressing those to be ordained, says, “The Lord has given you an example: that, just as he himself has done, so also you should do.” He goes on to say that “as Deacons, that is, as ministers of Jesus Christ,” they should “serve others with joy as [they] would serve the Lord.” He then warns them to “look upon all impurity and greed as the serving of false gods.”

It is at that point in the model homily that, as was noted above, the ritual book offers three alternatives, depending on the marital state of those to be ordained. “[I]n reality, there is not a lot of difference [between the three alternatives] because, to the married elect it makes reference to what is common to all and to the celibate ones only a few appropriate references are added.”⁴² Turner notes, “[t]he conclusion of the suggested homily is the same for all candidates, regardless of their marital status. They are to be planted and grounded in faith.”⁴³ They are urged to live and serve “without blemish and beyond reproach before God and others,” holding fast to “the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.” They are “to express the Word of God in speech and deed so that the Spirit may bring all people to life”⁴⁴ and “to help people become a pure offering to God.”⁴⁵ If they live and serve in this way, they can hope, on the last day, to hear the Lord say to them, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.”⁴⁶

The Prayer of Ordination

As with the rites of ordination of both a Bishop and Priests, after the homily, the rite of ordination of Deacons proceeds with a series of promises regarding the ministry they are

⁴⁰ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 127.

⁴¹ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 127.

⁴² Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 225.

⁴³ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 128.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 129.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 129.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 129.

about to assume, and the ordaining Bishop laying hands on the candidates. Unlike those other rites, however, no other clergy lay hands on the ordinands.⁴⁷

The Bishop then prays the prayer of ordination (see Appendix Six⁴⁸). The prayer is based on an ancient prayer for the ordination of Deacons, which has been continually used by the Roman Church since the sixteenth century.⁴⁹ The current prayer has been modified, but preserves that original structure of the prayer, namely, an introductory invocation, an anamnesis, an epiclesis, and a doxology.⁵⁰ As is the case with the two other prayers of ordination, this prayer “abounds in biblical allusions.”⁵¹

The invocation is similar to the prayer of ordination for Priests, asking God to draw near and then indicating some divine attributes. It then recalls that God is the one “who apportion[s] every order and assign[s] every office.” It also mentions that God “make[s] due provision for every age, through your Word, your Power, and your Wisdom, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.”

The anamnesis continues by noting how God has provided for the Church, which is “drawn together in the diversity of her members, and united by a wondrous bond through the Holy Spirit,” so that it can “grow and spread forth to build up a new temple.” The prayer then recalls the service of the sons of Levi in the tabernacle. It then mentions that “in the first days of your Church, your Son’s Apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, appointed seven men of good repute to help them in the daily ministry.” It also notes that the seven were entrusted this ministry “[b]y prayer and the laying on of hands.”

Then, as Turner notes, “[h]aving acknowledged these deeds that God has done, the bishop then makes his request. He asks God to pour out the sevenfold Holy Spirit upon these men.”⁵² This epicletic request is not made for the benefit of those being ordained, but so that they can “carry out faithfully the work of the ministry.” The Bishop goes on to name the evangelical virtues that should abound in new Deacons: “unfeigned love, concern for the sick and the poor, unassuming authority, the purity of innocence, and the observance of spiritual discipline.” This is followed by a further description of how they should conduct themselves. The Bishop asks “that their conduct may reflect God’s commandments, thus inspiring others.”⁵³ Thus, by following the example of Christ, “who came not to be served but to serve,” the Deacons can hope to “be found worthy to reign with [Christ] in heaven.”

⁴⁷ *OBPD*, 207.

⁴⁸ *OBPD*, 207.

⁴⁹ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 236.

⁵⁰ Miralles, *Teologia Liturgica dei Sacramenti*, 236.

⁵¹ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 136.

⁵² Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 136.

⁵³ Turner, *Present for God’s Call*, 137.

The whole prayer ends with the traditional doxology of Roman prayers. Then, the faithful assent to the prayer and make it their own by responding, “Amen.”

Observations on the Theology of Ordained Ministry Suggested by the Texts Examined

This cursory examination of the model homilies and prayers of ordination contained in the ritual ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons has tried to highlight the rich and developed theological understanding of ordained ministry of the Roman Catholic Church. Much more could be said about these texts, as well as to the other elements and texts that are part of ordination liturgies. Given the limits of this article, the following observations are offered to encourage and foster dialogue regarding the Roman Catholic theology of ordained ministry.

1. *Roman Catholic theology of ordained ministry is deeply grounded in Scripture.* As was noted in the various sections of this article, the model homilies and prayers examined are thoroughly imbued with scriptural references, including allusions from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This suggests that any consideration of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church must consider the biblical witness regarding the calling of certain individuals by God to serve in particular offices and ministries. The rites of ordination see in certain ministerial roles of the Old Testament prefigurations of Church offices and ministries established by Christ and the apostles.

2. *Roman Catholic theology understands ordained ministry within the context of salvation history.* Connected to the grounding of ordained ministry within Scripture, the texts examined, especially the prayers of ordination, situate ordained ministry within the larger context of God’s relationship with humanity as revealed and lived out in salvation history. Ordained ministry is seen as a way in which God continues to instruct, sanctify, and govern the People of God. In a special way, ordained ministry is a sacramental continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came into the world to do the will of his Father and continues that work, in part, through those who are ordained. In other words, the roles of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon have their origin in God’s will for the building up of the Body of Christ and the salvation of the world.

3. *The Roman Catholic view is that ordained ministry is not only a functional reality, but also an ontological one.* The texts examined in this article make clear that the function of ordained ministers is to continue the mission of the Church in the world and build up the Body of Christ. But they also indicate that ordained ministers do this not merely as deputed functionaries, but as sacramental participants and embodiments of Christ. The model homily for the ordination of Bishop says that Christ himself is

present among the faithful “in the Bishop surrounded by his Priests.”⁵⁴ The homily for the ordination of Priests says that the candidates “are to be configured to Christ the eternal High Priest and joined to the Priesthood of the Bishops.”⁵⁵ It also speaks of them as being “consecrated” to preach, govern, and celebrate divine worship. The homily for the ordination of Deacons states, “Consecrated by the laying on of hands passed down from the Apostles and bound more closely to the service of the altar, they will carry out the ministry of charity in the name of the Bishop or pastor.”⁵⁶ Through their consecration and configuration, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons make Christ the Teacher, Priest, Shephard, and Servant sacramentally present to the Church and the world.

4. *The sacramental configuration and consecration to Christ calls for a lived response from those in Holy Orders.* The model homilies and prayers of ordination make clear that, in being configured and consecrated to Christ, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons assume a particular responsibility of living and acting in a way that incarnates the example of Christ the Good Shepherd. It is the example of Christ, “who knows his sheep and is known by them, and who did not hesitate to lay down his life for them,”⁵⁷ that Bishops should strive to live out in their ministry. For their part, Priests are called to “[k]eep always before [their] eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who did not come to be served but to serve and who came to seek and to save what was lost.”⁵⁸ Those called to be Deacons are instructed, “The Lord has given you an example: that, just as he himself has done, so also you should do.”⁵⁹

5. *The action and grace of the Holy Spirit is essential for the ordination and the living out of the sacrament of Holy Orders.* One thing that all the model homilies and prayers of ordination emphasize is the role of the Holy Spirit in the actual ordination and in the ministry of the ordained. All the homilies make mention of the action of the Spirit in the establishment of the three orders of the sacrament. This is part of the way in which the Spirit builds up the Body of Christ that is the Church. The anamnestic sections of the prayers of ordination for both Priests and Deacons also make mention of the power and guidance of the Spirit in the establishment of those two orders. Of particular importance is that all three sacramental formulas, which are epicletic in nature, make explicit requests for the outpouring of the Spirit on those being ordained, so that they may have the necessary share in the mission and power of Christ. Finally, the homilies

⁵⁴ *OBPD*, 39.

⁵⁵ *OBPD*, 123.

⁵⁶ *OBPD*, 199.

⁵⁷ *OBPD*, 39.

⁵⁸ *OBPD*, 39, 123.

⁵⁹ *OBPD*, 199.

and prayers of ordination assert the need for the ongoing grace of the Spirit, so that those in Holy Orders may fulfill their ministry in accordance with the will of God and the need of the Church.

Conclusion

This review of the model homilies and prayers of ordination contained in the ritual ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons has sought to examine how these liturgical texts can help identify dimensions of theological reflection on the nature and purpose of ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic Church today. The observations offered at the end of the article seek to propose some fundamental points that can be discerned from the texts that have been examined, in the hope that they can serve as a starting point for a thoughtful dialogue on ordained ministry as understood by the Roman Catholic Church.



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Appendix One: Model Homily for the Ordination of a Bishop

Dearly beloved, consider carefully the nature of the rank in the Church to which our brother is to be raised. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent from the Father to redeem the human race, himself sent twelve Apostles into the world. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they were to preach the Gospel, and gathering all peoples into one flock, they were to sanctify and govern them. In order that this ministry might remain until the end of time, the Apostles in turn chose helpers for themselves. Through the laying on of hands, they passed on to them the gift of the Holy Spirit that they themselves received from Christ. In this way, the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred. Thus, the tradition handed down from the beginning, through the unbroken succession of Bishops, is preserved from generation to generation, and the work of the Savior continues and grows even to our own times.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is High Priest forever, is himself present among you in the Bishop surrounded by his Priests. For through the ministry of the Bishop, Christ himself never ceases to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments of faith to those who believe. Through the fatherly office of the Bishop, Christ himself adds and gathers new members to his Body. Through the wisdom and prudence of the Bishop, Christ himself leads you on your earthly pilgrimage toward eternal happiness.

Gladly and gratefully, therefore, please receive our brother whom we, as Bishops, admit into our College through the laying on of hands. Honor him as a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God. To him have been entrusted both the task of bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel and the ministry of the Spirit and of justice. Remember the words that Christ spoke to the Apostles: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

And now, dear brother, you have been chosen by the Lord. Consider that you have been taken from among the people and appointed to act on their behalf in those things that pertain to God. For the title of Bishop signifies a task, not an honor; a Bishop must strive to benefit others rather than to lord it over them. For in keeping with the precept of the Master, let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader be as one who serves. Preach in season and out of season; reprove with all patience and sound teaching. Whenever you pray and offer sacrifice for the people committed to your care, seek with zeal and devotion to obtain an abundance of grace for them from the fullness of Christ’s holiness.

In the Church entrusted to you, be a faithful steward, moderator and guardian of the mysteries of Christ. As one chosen by the Father to govern his family, be mindful always of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and is known by them, and who did not hesitate to lay down his life for them.

With the charity of a father and brother, love all those whom God places in your care, especially the Priests and Deacons, who are your co-workers in the ministry of Christ; but love also the poor and the weak, foreigners and strangers. Exhort the faithful to work with you in your apostolic labors; do not refuse to listen willingly to them. Never tire of caring for those who are not yet gathered into the one fold of Christ; for they too are entrusted to you in the Lord. Never forget that you are joined to the College of Bishops in the Catholic Church, which is unified by the bond of charity; and so, you should have a constant concern for all the Churches and gladly come to the aid of Churches in need. Keep watch, therefore, over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit places you to govern the Church of God: in the name of the Father, whose image you represent in the Church; and in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, whose office of Teacher, Priest and Shepherd you will discharge; and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who enlivens the Church of Christ and, by his power, strengthens us in our weakness.

Appendix Two: Prayer of Ordination of a Bishop

God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all consolation, who dwell on high and look upon the lowly, who know all things before they come to be: it is you who established order in your Church through your gracious word, who from the beginning predestined a righteous people born of Abraham, who instituted rulers and priests and did not leave your sanctuary without ministry, who from the beginning of the world have been pleased to be glorified in those you have chosen.

NOW POUR FORTH UPON THIS CHOSEN ONE THE POWER THAT IS FROM YOU, THE GOVERNING SPIRIT, WHOM YOU GAVE TO YOUR BELOVED SON JESUS CHRIST, AND WHOM HE GAVE TO THE HOLY APOSTLES, WHO ESTABLISHED THE CHURCH IN EACH PLACE AS YOUR SANCTUARY, TO THE GLORY AND UNFAILING PRAISE OF YOUR NAME.

Grant, O Father, knower of all hearts, that this your servant whom you have chosen for the Episcopate may nourish your holy flock and may without reproach exercise before you the High Priesthood, serving you night and day; that he may unceasingly cause your face to shine upon us and offer the gifts of your Holy Church. Grant that by the strength of the Spirit of the high priesthood he may have authority to forgive sins according to your command; that he may apportion offices according to your precept and loosen every bond according to the authority you gave the Apostles; may he be pleasing to you in meekness and purity of heart, offering a sweet fragrance to you through your Son Jesus Christ, through whom glory and power and honor are yours, with the Holy Spirit in the holy Church both now and forever and ever. Amen.

Appendix Three: Model Homily for the Ordination of Several Priests

Dearly beloved; since these men, our sons and your relatives and friends, are soon to be advanced to the Order of Priests, consider carefully the nature of the ministerial rank in the Church to which they shall be raised.

Indeed, the entire holy People of God is made a royal priesthood in Christ. Nevertheless, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, chose certain of his disciples to exercise in his name, on behalf of the human race, a public priestly office in the Church; for Christ, who was sent from the Father, himself in turn sent the Apostles into the world, that through them and their successors, the Bishops, he might exercise without ceasing his own office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd. In addition, Priests are established as co-workers of the Order of Bishops with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the People of God.

Now that mature deliberation has taken place, these brothers are to be ordained to the Priesthood in the Order of the presbyterate, that they may serve Christ the Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd. By the priestly ministry, his Body, that is the Church, is built up and grows into a holy temple, the People of God.

These men are to be configured to Christ the eternal High Priest and joined to the Priesthood of the Bishops; they will be consecrated as true Priests of the New Testament, in order to preach the Gospel, shepherd God's people, and celebrate divine worship, especially in the Lord's sacrifice.

Now, beloved sons, you are to be raised to the Order of the Priesthood, and for your part, you will exercise in Christ the Teacher the sacred office of teaching. Impart to everyone the Word of God that you yourselves have received with joy. Meditating on the law of the Lord, see that you believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.

And so, let your teaching be nourishment for the People of God, and let the holiness of your life be a pleasing fragrance for Christ's faithful, so that you may build up by word and example that house which is the Church of God.

You will also exercise in Christ the office of sanctifying; for by your ministry the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful will be made perfect: in the celebration of the mysteries, it is united to the Sacrifice of Christ, which is offered, through your hands and in union with them, in an unbloody manner on the altar. Understand, therefore, what you do, and imitate what you celebrate; as celebrants of the mystery of the Lord's Death and Resurrection, may you strive to put to death whatever is sinful within you and to walk in newness of life.

Remember, when you gather men and women into the People of God through Baptism, and in the name of Christ and the Church, forgive sins in the Sacrament of Penance, when you comfort the sick with holy oil and celebrate the sacred rites when

you offer praise and thanksgiving through the hours of the day and pray not only for the People of God but for the whole world: always remember that you have been taken from among the people and appointed on their behalf in those things that pertain to God. Fulfill, therefore, the ministry of Christ the Priest with abiding joy and genuine love. Seek not your own concerns but those of Jesus Christ.

Finally, dear sons, united with your Bishop and subject to him, fulfill the office of Christ, head and shepherd, to the best of your ability. Strive to gather the faithful together into one family, so that you may lead them to God the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. Keep always before your eyes the example of the Good Shepherd, who did not come to be served but to serve and who came to seek and to save what was lost.

Appendix Four: Prayer of Ordination of Several Priests

Draw near, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, author of human dignity and bestower of all graces, through whom all things progress, through whom everything is made firm, who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in order to form a priestly people, establish among them ministers of Christ your Son in various orders.

Already in the earlier covenant there arose offices instituted by mystical rites: so that when you had set Moses and Aaron over your people to govern and sanctify them, you chose men next in order and dignity to join them and assist in their work.

Thus in the desert, you instilled the spirit of Moses in the minds of seventy wise men; with them as helpers he more easily governed your people.

So too, over the sons of Aaron you poured an abundant share of their father's fullness, that the number of priests prescribed by the Law might be sufficient for the sacrifices of the tabernacle, which were a shadow of the good things to come.

But in these last days, holy Father, you sent your Son into the world, Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Through the Holy Spirit, he offered himself unblemished to you and made his Apostles, who were consecrated in the truth, sharers in his mission; to them you added companions to proclaim and carry out the work of salvation through all the world.

Now, we pray, O Lord, provide also for our weakness these helpers whom we need for the exercise of the Apostolic Priesthood.

GRANT, WE PRAY, ALMIGHTY FATHER, TO THESE YOUR SERVANTS THE DIGNITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD: RENEW DEEP WITHIN THEM THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS; MAY THEY HOLD THE OFFICE SECOND IN ORDER, RECEIVED FROM YOU, O GOD, AND BY THE EXAMPLE OF THEIR MANNER OF LIFE MAY THEY INSPIRE RIGHT CONDUCT.

May they be trustworthy co-workers with our order, so that by their preaching and through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the words of the Gospel may bear fruit in human hearts and reach even to the ends of the earth.

Together with us, may they be faithful stewards of your mysteries, so that your people may be renewed through the cleansing waters of rebirth and refreshed from your altar, so that sinners may be reconcile and the sick raised up.

May they be joined to us, Lord, in imploring your mercy for the people entrusted to them and for the whole world.

Thus, may the full number of the nations, gathered together in Christ, become your one people, brought to perfection in your kingdom.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Appendix Five: Model Homily for the Ordination of Several Deacons

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters: since these men, our sons and your relatives and friends, are soon to be advanced to the Order of Deacons, consider carefully the nature of the ministerial rank to which they shall be raised.

Strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, they will help the Bishop and his Priests in the ministries of the word, of the altar, and of charity, showing themselves to be servants of all. As ministers of the altar, they will proclaim the Gospel, prepare the sacrifice, and distribute the Body and Blood of the Lord to the faithful.

At the Bishop's direction it will also be their duty to exhort believers and unbelievers alike and instruct them in holy doctrine, to preside over public prayer, administer Baptism, assist at and bless Marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, and conduct funeral rites.

Consecrated by the laying on of hands passed down from the Apostles and bound more closely to the service of the altar, they will carry out a ministry of charity in the name of the Bishop or pastor. In all these duties, let them act with the help of God in such a way that you recognize them as disciples of him who did not come to be served but to serve.

Now, beloved sons, you are to be raised to the Order of the Diaconate. The Lord has given you an example: that, just as he himself has done, so also you should do.

And so, as Deacons, that is, as ministers of Jesus Christ, who appeared in the midst of the disciples as one who serves, do the will of God in charity from the heart; serve others with joy as you would serve the Lord. Since, in fact, no one can serve two masters, look upon all impurity and greed as the serving of false gods.

Since you present yourselves for the Order of the Diaconate of your own free choice, you must be like those once chosen by the Apostles for the ministry of charity: men of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

If both married and unmarried elect are to be ordained, he concludes:

Those of you who will exercise your ministry in the celibate state must know that celibacy is both a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it, as well as a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world. For, urged on by a sincere love of Christ the Lord and living in this state with total dedication, you will cling more readily to Christ with an undivided heart, you will devote yourselves with greater freedom to the service of God and others, and you will serve single-mindedly the work of spiritual rebirth.

Whether or not you have been called to holy celibacy, be firmly planted and grounded in faith. Show yourselves without blemish and beyond reproach before God and others, as is proper for the ministers of Christ and the stewards of God's mysteries. Do not allow yourselves to be turned away from the hope of the Gospel which you must not only hear but also serve. Hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience and express by your actions the word of God, which your lips proclaim, so that the Christian people, brought to life by the Spirit, may become a pure offering accepted by God, and so that you yourselves, when you go out to meet the Lord on the last day, may be able to hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Or, if only unmarried elect are to be ordained, he concludes:

Since you present yourselves for the Order of the Diaconate of your own free choice, you must be like those once chosen by the Apostles for the ministry of charity: men of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

You will exercise your ministry in the celibate state. Celibacy is both a sign of pastoral charity and an incentive to it, as well as a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world. For, urged on by a sincere love of Christ the Lord and living in this state with total dedication, you will cling more readily to Christ with an undivided heart, you will devote yourselves with greater freedom to the service of God and others, and you will serve single-mindedly the work of spiritual rebirth. Firmly planted and grounded in faith, show yourselves without blemish and beyond reproach before God and others, as is proper for the ministers of Christ and the stewards of God's mysteries. Do not allow yourselves to be turned away from the hope of the Gospel which you must not only hear but also serve. Hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience and express by your actions the word of God, which your lips proclaim, so that the Christian people, brought to life by the Spirit, may become a pure offering accepted by God, and so that you yourselves, when you go out to meet the Lord on the last day, may be able to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

If only married elect are to be ordained, he concludes:

You must be like those once chosen by the Apostles for the ministry of charity: men of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Firmly planted and grounded in faith, you are to show yourselves without blemish and beyond reproach before God and others, as is proper for the ministers of Christ and the stewards of God's mysteries. Do not allow yourselves to be turned away from the hope of the Gospel which you must not only hear but also serve. Hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience and express by your actions the word of God, which your lips proclaim, so that the Christian people, brought to life by the Spirit, may become a pure offering accepted by God, and so that you yourselves, when you go out to meet the Lord on the last day, may be able to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Appendix Six: Prayer of Ordination of Several Deacons

Draw near, we pray, almighty God, giver of every grace, who apportion every order and assign every office. While remaining unchanged, you make all things new and, setting all things in order with everlasting providence, you make due provision for every age, through your Word, your Power, and your Wisdom, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

You grant that your Church, his Body, adorned with manifold heavenly graces, drawn together in the diversity of her members, and united by a wondrous bond through the Holy Spirit, should grow and spread forth to build up a new temple. As once you chose the sons of Levi to minister in the former tabernacle, so now you establish three ranks of ministers in their sacred offices to serve your name.

Thus, in the first days of your Church, your Son's Apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, appointed seven men of good repute to help them in the daily ministry, so that they might devote themselves more fully to prayer and the preaching of the word. By prayer and the laying on of hands they entrusted to these chosen men the ministry of serving at table.

Look favorably also on these your servants, we pray, O Lord, whom we humbly dedicate to serve at your holy altars in the office of the Diaconate.

SEND FORTH THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON THEM, O LORD, WE PRAY,
THAT THEY MAY BE STRENGTHENED BY THE GIFT OF YOUR
SEVENFOLD GRACE TO CARRY OUT FAITHFULLY THE WORK OF THE
MINISTRY.

May every evangelical virtue abound in them: unfeigned love, concern for the sick and the poor, unassuming authority, the purity of innocence, and the observance of spiritual discipline.

May your precepts shine forth in their conduct, that by the example of their manner of life they may inspire the imitation of your holy people. In offering the witness of a good conscience, may they remain firm and steadfast in Christ, so that,

imitating your Son on earth, who came not to be served but to serve, they may be found worthy to reign with him in heaven.

Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.