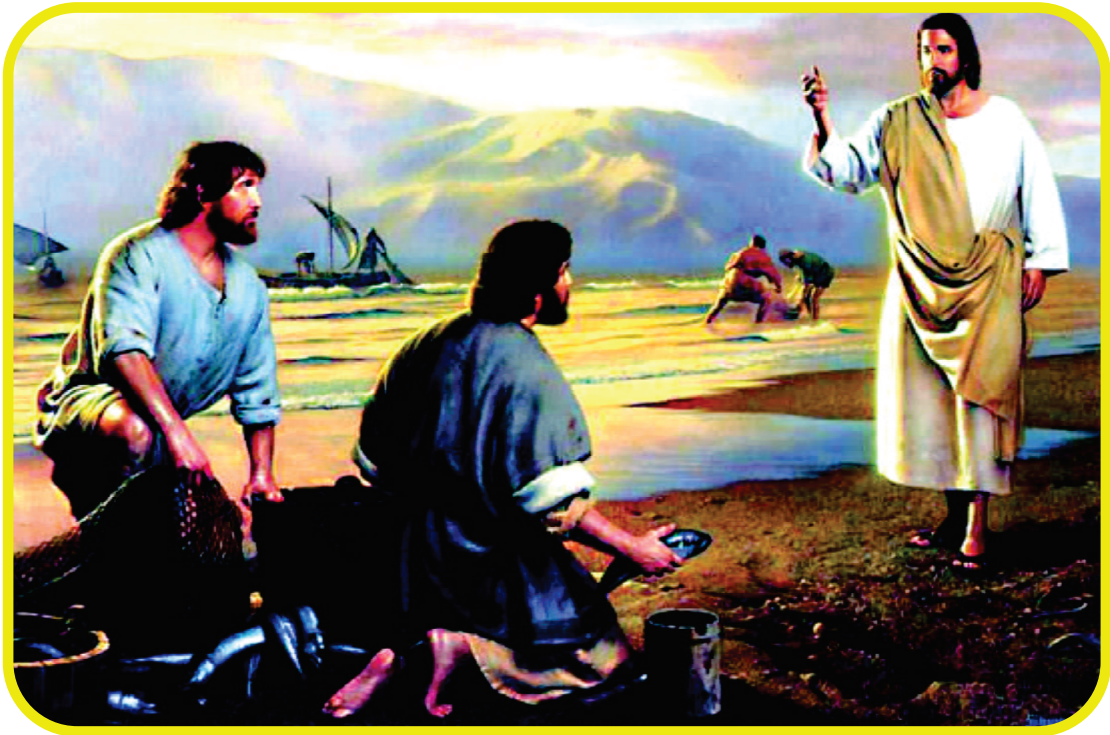


# THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS



As Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. And he said to them: **“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”**. (Mt.4:18-20). This is a beautiful scene depicting how Jesus invites the disciples to serve in the kingdom of God, he planned to institute. And they, leaving their parents and everything, followed Jesus. **The service of the kingdom of God is, at present, entrusted to the priests. This mission will be rendered in the Church until the end of the world.**

## **Priesthood in the Old Testament**

God selected Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. He selected the tribe of Leviespecially for the liturgical service; they were appointed to offer gifts and

sacrifices. The sacrifices and priesthood of the old covenant were merely shadows of the sacrifice and priesthood of the new covenant to be perfected through Jesus. “..When Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.... by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified”.

### **ACTIVITY -1**

Read in groups chapter nine of the letter to the Hebrews and compare the priesthood of the Old Testament with the priesthood of Jesus.

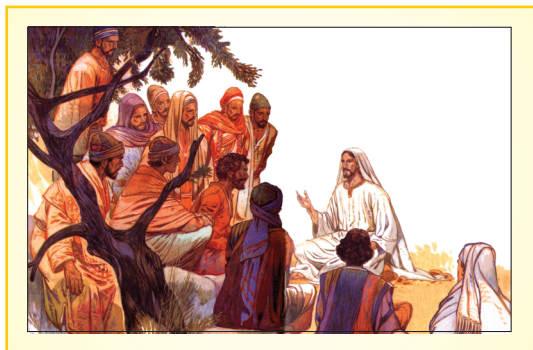
### **Priest - One Who is Placed in the Front**

The word 'priest' means one who is placed in front. Yes, God places him in front of the people; at the same time, he is placed in front of God by the Church. There is also one mediator between God and humankind. (1 Tim. 2: 5). The priest, through his priesthood, shares the eternal priesthood of Jesus. Thus, he acts as the mediator between God and man.

### **The Common Priesthood**

All baptized are incorporated into the priesthood of Jesus. This is the common priesthood of the people of God. “..You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people” (1Peter. 2: 9) St. Peter refers, here, to the common priesthood. Common priesthood exhorts us to carry on our life and activities in a spirit of sacrificial offering and thus introduce Jesus to all around us.

### **The Ministerial Priesthood**



God selects some people and appoints them especially for his service. Jesus makes them share his mission of leading, teaching, and sanctifying the people of God. **Jesus selected them and authorized them to proclaim the message, to heal the sick, and to cast out demons.** (Mk 3:14-15). Thus, he gave the disciples authority to reach the

fruits of salvation he secured, through the paschal mysteries, to the future generations. He gifted them with the Holy Spirit and strengthened them. This same mission, now, he has entrusted to the bishops, the successors of the apostles, and their assistant ministers, the priests and the deacons.

### **The Co-workers of the Disciples**

Wherever the disciples preached the gospel, they appointed the priests as their co-workers and ordered them to be vigilant to tend the flock of God. **The apostles ordained their assistant ministers 'laying hands on them'**. St. Paul says to Timothy, “.. **I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands** (2 Tim. 1:6) **The bishops who are successors of the apostles hand over the priesthood through 'the laying on of hands'**. The most important part of the ministry of the Holy Orders is the prayer of 'laying on of hands'. Priesthood is conferred through this rite of 'laying on of hands' and with the special grace of the Holy Spirit. In the ancient Church, the deacons were ordained through 'laying on of hands'. (Acts. 6: 1-6).

### **The Succession of the Apostles and the Grace of the Holy Spirit**

There are two prayers during imposition of hands in the ordination service of the Syro-Malabar liturgy. In the first prayer of imposition, the bishop prays thus: “ Lord, true to the apostolic tradition entrusted upon us, through the laying on of hands, I am presenting this humble servant in front of you so as to be a selected priest of your Church. May the grace of the Holy Spirit descend upon him, and with the mercy and blessings of your only Son, he may become mature enough to execute the ministry of priesthood in all perfection”. This prayer clarifies that the Holy Orders has an apostolic succession and that it is continued with the power of the Holy Spirit. Even if the person called for priesthood is unworthy, the power of the divine Spirit makes him worthy. The prayer during the liturgy of the word reminds us about this fact: “ With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the status of actual priesthood is being granted through the imposition of hands. Though we are humble and insignificant, out of your mercy you have made us eligible to be worthy members of the body of your Church and render spiritual service to the faithful.”

## Priestly Duties

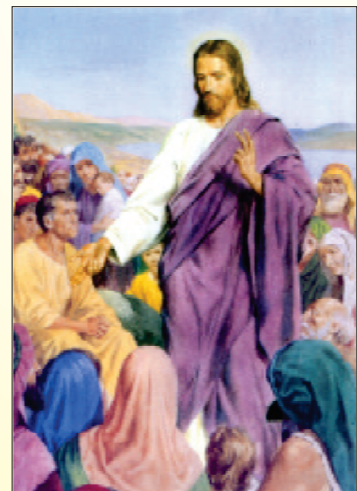
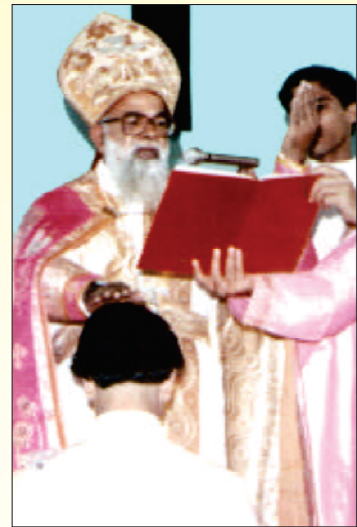
In the prayer of the imposition of hands, the celebrant reminds of the special duties of a priest and also prays for the grace to execute them. The important duties of a priest, mentioned in this prayer, are preaching the word of truth, healing the sick laying hands on them, performing the ministries in the sanctuary with a clear conscience, officiating the sacraments of Reconciliation and Baptism and Matrimony. Through these, a priest is executing the missions of Christ.

### Priest- the Teacher

The prophets were people appointed by God to converse with the people of Israel in the name of God and lead them to God after correcting their mistakes. Teaching is a prophetic mission. Jesus was the greatest God-sent prophet. He was the greatest teacher the world has ever seen. He devoted his public life entirely to teach. The churches, synagogues, hilltops, valleys, fields and even seashore were pulpits for him to teach. The priest, who partakes in Jesus' priesthood, is bound to teach. The primary duty of a priest is to inform the good news of salvation to everyone. (Priests 4). It is the duty of a priest to impart authoritative knowledge pertaining to faith and morality to the people of God. He must execute this mission according to the teachings of the Church.

### ACTIVITY - 2

Group the children into four and ask them to share the qualities that you expect if one of you becomes a priest.





## Priest - the Sanctifier

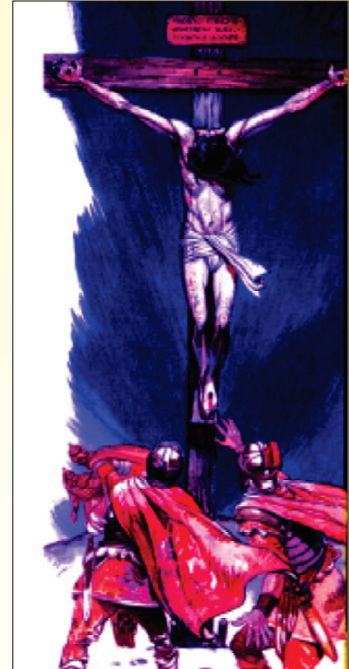
The priests of the old covenant were selected and ordained by God to celebrate sacrifices and offerings and thereby sanctify them. But, those sacrifices and offerings were too ineffective to transform the worshippers because they were mere shadows of the real. On the other hand, Jesus, celebrating an eternal sacrifice and that too only once, could secure the sanctification - salvation - of the whole of humanity. The priest who partakes in the priesthood of Jesus is invited to sanctify the people of God. He fulfills this mission through the sanctifying rituals of the holy Qurbana and the sacraments. His faith and sanctity in life and prayer are helpful for the sanctification of the people of God.

## Priest - the Leader

God crowned and appointed kings to lead and protect Israel. Jesus is the true shepherd who sacrificed his life for his people. The priests are supposed to lead the flock through the pastures of grace and ultimately to heaven. His leadership is that of service, not of authority. Jesus said: "The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve". A priest has to conduct the people of God from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the love of God.

## The Call to Priesthood

Just as Jesus selected and appointed the twelve disciples, he invites certain people, today, to execute his mission. We should be ready to respond to this. The sacrament of the Holy Orders, through which one is incorporated into the priesthood of Jesus is very sublime.



The hymn in the ritual of the Holy Orders is worthy of attention : ' How superior is the position you shoulder..." If God calls us for the excellent priesthood we must respond to the call. God has His own plans for all of us. When we live according to God's plan our life becomes fruitful. We must pray incessantly to know what is God's plan for us. Frequent reception of the sacraments, Bible reading etc. are means to promote vocations to priesthood. We should pray that God provides many good priests to the Church.

**LET US  
READ AND  
MEDITATE THE  
WORD OF GOD**

(2 Tim. 1 : 3 - 14)

**A Verse to Remember**

"And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was".

(Heb. 5: 4)

**Let us Pray**

O Jesus who asked us to pray to send people to the field of harvest,  
we pray that you give us many priests, religious and lay apostles.

**My Resolution**

I will pray for the priests daily.

## **Teachings of the Fathers of the Church**

The priests, through the sacrament of the Holy Orders, receive the perfect image of Jesus, the high priest. The priests being the ministers of Jesus, the head of the Church and the co-workers of the bishops, must engage in building up the Church, the full body of Christ. Like all Christians, they too have received the signs of divine vocation and grace in the consecration of baptism. So they are enabled and obliged even in the midst of human weakness to seek perfection. (Priests 12)

## **QUESTIONS**

1. How does a priest become the mediator between God and man?
2. Write a short note: Common priesthood and ministerial priesthood.
3. One becomes a priest with the blessings of the Holy Spirit - Elucidate.
4. What are the duties of a priest?
5. What all should be done to promote vocation to priesthood and religious life?