

The Ordained and Common Priesthood
A reflection on their relationships to each other and the Priesthood of Christ

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I. Introduction

Bishop Choby has asked me to spend a few minutes talking to you about the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This includes all of us, all of the baptized in the entire Church. We all belong to the common priesthood, the priesthood of the baptized, even Bishop Choby, your parish priests, and me. Now, this is not to be confused with the ministerial priesthood, those of us ordained to serve the Church as priests. In the ordained priesthood, there are three orders to Holy Orders: bishops, priests, and deacons (although that last one is not part of the ordained priesthood, just part of the clergy). So, that's the layout of everything I want to talk about today. Here's the outline: I'm going to talk in order about the laity, deacons, priests, and bishop, and the role of each in the Church, and the relationship of each with the others orders and laity of the diocese. Hopefully, when I am through, you will understand how the various roles in the ordained and laity relate to each other and how each applies the triple *munera* (the offices) of Jesus: priest, prophet, and king.

II. Priesthood of the Laity

Let's start our shared priesthood, from the baby baptized this morning to Bishop Choby, we are all members of the common priesthood, the priesthood of the baptized. When we are ordained to the ministerial priesthood, we remain members of the common priesthood, but we take on a new role as well.

When we were baptized into Christ, when we became Christians, we began sharing in the triple office of Christ: priest, prophet, and king. "The whole People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them" (CCC 783).

In what way does the laity participate in the priestly office of Jesus Christ? You attend Mass, but (as we will discuss more later), the Eucharistic Sacrifice is principally offered by the priest. The current translation of the priest's invitation to prayer at the end of the offertory even points to this fact: "Pray, brethren that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father" (Roman Missal, Order of Mass 29).¹ But, the idea of priesthood is somewhat nonsensical without a sacrifice, so what does the laity sacrifice? The short version is the sacrifice of the laity is your life, your sufferings, everything you do. The Roman Catechism from shortly after the Council of Trent put it like this (Here, they use the term "internal priesthood" for what we now call the Common Priesthood of the Baptized):

They, through faith inflamed by charity, immolate on the altar of their heart spiritual sacrifices unto God; and in the number of these sacrifices are to be reckoned all good and virtuous actions, which they refer to the glory of God. Hence we read in the Apocalypse: *Christ hath washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom, and priests unto God and his father.* To the same effect the prince of the apostles has said: *Be you also as lively stones, built up, a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* The apostle also exhorts us, *to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, our reasonable service;*^b and David had said long before: *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God! thou wilt not despise;* all which, it is easy to perceive, regard the internal priesthood.² (CCT 23)

The laity participate in Jesus' prophetic office – to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

Let's listen to *Lumen Gentium*: "The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name" (LG 12). The people of God, all of the Christian faithful, come to Mass to be fed by the Eucharist and

¹ *The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II, Third Typical Edition.* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011). Citations from the Roman Missal will be referenced with OM (order of Mass) or GIRM (General Instruction on the Roman Missal).

² Catholic Church, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Routledge and Co., 1852). Hereafter, cited as CCT.

the Word of the Gospel. With the spiritual strength we receive through Word and Sacrament, we are empowered to go into the world and share the Good News that is the new life offered by our Lord.

The laity participate in Jesus' royal or kingly office. According to the Catechism, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, "For the Christian, 'to reign is to serve him,' particularly when serving 'the poor and the suffering, in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder.' The People of God fulfill its royal dignity by a life in keeping with its vocation to serve with Christ" (CCC 786). So, while it is the job of the Church to sanctify the people of God, to help the Christian faithful order their own lives to God, it is the role of the laity to sanctify the whole world, to participate in the royal office of Christ by serving with him, just as he did when he washed the feet of his apostles at the Last Supper (Jn 13:1-17). The laity is also called to govern their own passions, to grow in virtue.

Let me conclude my reflections on the role of the laity by quoting Pope Leo XIII (as quoted in the Catechism):

The sign of the cross makes kings of all those reborn in Christ and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them as priests, so that, apart from the particular service of our ministry, all spiritual and rational Christians are recognized as members of this royal race and sharers in Christ's priestly office. What, indeed, is as royal for a soul as to govern the body in obedience to God? And what is as priestly as to dedicate a pure conscience to the Lord and to offer the spotless offerings of devotion on the altar of the heart? (CCC 786)

In these words, Pope Saint Leo reflects the beauty of the royal and priestly role of the baptismal priesthood. Add to this the responsibility to proclaim this Gospel to the world as we are called to do with one of the dismissals of the Mass, "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" (OM 144) and we bring in the prophetic role.

III. Order of the Diaconate

From here, we move into the ordained ministry, the relationship of the clergy to the Church, the *munera* of Jesus, the people of God, and the World. Let me start by reminding us of a small distinction in the relationship of the diaconate to the Church. Since, today, most deacons serve in parishes, we end up picturing the hierarchy of the Church as going from bishop to priest to deacon. This is not, strictly speaking, accurate (but don't misunderstand me, it is still the practical arrangement we use to govern the diocese). The priests assist the bishop serving *in personi Christi Capitis*, in the person of Christ the head. The deacon assists the bishop directly, also, *in persona Christi servi*, in the person of Christ the servant. This direct relationship to the bishop is expressed by the fact that, in the ordination, the bishop alone lays hands on the deacon, a practice that goes back to the earliest centuries of the Church. In practical terms, many of our permanent deacons are assigned to parishes, so they work under and assist the priest, but this does not replace their relationship to the bishop.

The deacon participates in the priestly office of Christ in his own proper way. The Church refers to this office as the “diaconate of the liturgy” (LG 29). The deacon prepares the altar and vessels for the sacrifice of the Mass. He has a special relationship to the chalice; that is why, if communion is to be distributed under both species, the deacon should be the minister of the cup instead of a second minister distributing hosts (GIRM 182). The priestly office of Christ is also expressed in the diaconate in the responsibility to pray with and for the whole Church in the Liturgy of the Hours. Transitional deacons promise to undertake the entire office, and permanent deacons undertake that portion of the office appropriate to their state in life and expected by the bishop to whom they promise their respect and obedience.

The deacon's most pronounced participation in the prophetic office of Christ is also found in the liturgy. The deacon is also especially entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel. *Lumen Gentium* tells us "It is the duty of the deacon...to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful [and] to instruct and exhort the people" (LG 29).

Just as with the responsibility of the laity to participate in Christ's kingly office through service, the deacon's principle participation in the royal *munus* is in service to the people of God. Recall that this was the very origin of the diaconate.

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

In this short passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we find both the original purpose of the order of deacon and the first ordinations in the Church. The Church called seven men to serve those of the people of God who were being left out or who needed additional assistance, in this case, the widows. Those seven men were ordained to the ministry of service through the laying on of hands by the apostles, the first bishops, just as deacons are today. The other way that deacons exercise their participation in Christ's royal *munus* is through administration for parishes and diocesan offices. This was not part of the role of the deacon in that initial scriptural age, but it quickly developed as more organization became required for the growing Church. This role has returned to prominence since the restoration of the permanent diaconate after the Second Vatican Council.

Lumen Gentium concisely lays out the whole responsibilities of the office of the deacon.

It is the duty of the deacon, according as it shall have been assigned to him by competent authority, to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services. Dedicated to duties of charity and of administration, let deacons be mindful of the admonition of Blessed Polycarp: “Be merciful, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all.” (LG 29)

These roles express the deacon’s full participation in the threefold *munera* of Christ. That participation is symbolized in the ordination rites by which a man enters this order. Those symbols are the next thing I want to discuss.

The deacon’s participation in the priestly *munus* and his special relationship to the altar is expressed first in the promises made by the new ordinands. The bishop asks the ordinand, “Do you resolve to maintain and deepen the spirit of prayer that is proper to your way of life and, in keeping with this spirit and what is required, of you, to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the People of God and indeed for the whole world?” (Rites of Ordination 200)³ This official charge to act in a formal way to sanctify the Church, the People of God, is an expression of the deacon’s participation in Christ’s priestly *munus*.

The most visible symbol of a deacon’s participation in Christ’s threefold *munera* reflects his participation in the *munus* of prophet. After the prayer of ordination, the deacon is symbolically handed the Book of the Gospels with the admonition, “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach” (RO 210). The core of the prophetic *munus* is the proclamation and teaching of the Gospel. The words that accompany the gesture, as is often the case in liturgy, provide explanation for the symbol. The deacon, in his ordination, has become a herald of the Gospel. He has taken on an office in which he should, at all times, proclaim the Gospel. For that

³ Hereafter, references to the Rites of Ordination will be abbreviated RO.

proclamation to be authentic, he must believe in the Gospel itself; it cannot be a merely external expression. As the deacon has deepened his own prayer life and trust in the Gospel, he can teach authentically. The bishop also charges the new deacon to always live in accord with what he reads in the Gospel and teaches so that his life will serve as an example rather than a source of scandal.

The ordination rite also expresses the deacon's new participation as a cleric in the royal *munus* of Jesus Christ. The deacon joins the hierarchical structure of the clergy and promises respect and obedience to the bishop and his successors, who will now be the new deacon's superiors.

IV. Order of the Presbyterate

From here, let's move from the diaconate to the order of the presbyterate, the priests. The priest's participation in the *munera* of Christ, is, to most, more external and clear than that of the laity and diaconate. The Catechism of the Council of Trent (the Roman Catechism I mentioned earlier) refers to the ordained priesthood as the external priesthood as distinct from the internal priesthood shared by all the baptized.

The external priesthood does not extend indiscriminately to the great body of all the faithful, but is suited to certain men who, instituted, and consecrated to God, by the lawful imposition of hands and the solemn ceremonies of the Church, are devoted to some particular and sacred office of the ministry. The office, then, of the priest is to offer sacrifice unto God, and to administer the sacraments of the Church, as is declared by the rites used at his consecration. (CCT XXIII-XIV)

The most obvious participation of the presbyter in Christ's priestly *munus* is presiding at the Mass and offering the Eucharist.

“It is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful (synaxis) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred office; there, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again and apply, until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the New Testament, that namely of

Christ offering himself once for all a spotless victim to the Father.” From this unique sacrifice their whole priestly ministry draws its strength. (CCC 1566)

Additionally, the priest offers the other sacraments to the People of God, several of which require an ordained priest for both liceity and validity. Under the priestly *munus*, the priest, like the deacon, also offers the Liturgy of the Hours officially and formally with and for the Church. I want to add one more dimension to our discussion of the three *munera* of Christ as they are expressed in the ordained priesthood. The very layout of the sanctuary of each church expresses these three offices that are filled by the priest. The priestly and sacrificial *munus* is expressed by the Altar, which is the center of our sanctuaries.

The priest’s participation in the prophetic *munus* of Christ is similar to that of the deacon. One significant difference, however, is that, in the priesthood, there is no longer a distinction between the “transitional” and “permanent” as in the diaconate (although I have known a few priests who we jokingly call ordained to the “transitional presbyterate, but that’s a different story). A priest takes on the office as his full time and only job. As priests, we even forego the natural good of a wife and family for the sake of the heavenly goods and focusing on his responsibilities to his parish (or other assignment) and to the Gospel.

We can divide the priest’s prophetic role into two categories, his responsibility to the faithful and to proclaim the Gospel to the nations, the non-Christians, in the terminology of Vatican II, *ad gentes*. The Council says “The People of God are joined together primarily by the word of the living God. And rightfully they expect this from their priests” (PO 4). In his prophetic relationship to the Christian faithful, the priest has a responsibility to catechize. Now, since the early Church, there have been laypeople in the role of catechist who participate in the role of teaching the faithful. I am **in no way** implying that laypeople should no longer be involved in that role; the passing on of the faith is an integral part of their own participation in

their baptismal priesthood like I said earlier. However, just as the priests are cooperators with the bishops, and the deacons are the cooperators with the bishops and priests, when the laity take on a formal role of catechist, they do so in cooperation with the priest who has the responsibility to see that the truths of the Gospel and the Christian faith are taught to the faithful entrusted to him. Let's listen to what the Council Fathers had to say about the priest's prophetic role to the People of God.

In the Christian community, especially among those who seem to understand and believe little of what they practice, the preaching of the word is needed for the very ministering of the sacraments. They are precisely sacraments of faith, a faith which is born of and nourished by the word. This is especially true of the Liturgy of the Word in the celebration of Mass, in which the proclaiming of the death and resurrection of Christ is inseparably joined to the response of the people who hear, and to the very offering whereby Christ ratified the New Testament in his blood. In this offering the faithful are united both by their dispositions and by their discernment of the sacrament. (PO 4)

In that same section (actually immediately before what I just read to you), the Council Fathers speak of the priest's responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard the Gospel and come to believe.

Since no one can be saved who does not first believe, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all. In this way they fulfill the command of the Lord: "Going therefore into the whole world preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15), and they establish and build up the People of God. Through the saving word the spark of faith is lit in the hearts of unbelievers, and fed in the hearts of the faithful. This is the way that the congregation of faithful is started and grows, just as the Apostle describes: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

To all men, therefore, priests are debtors that the truth of the Gospel which they have may be given to others. (PO 4)

My fellow priests, let me repeat that first part. We have the "primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all" (PO 4). When we are called to judgment, we will be judged (among other things) on how well we fulfilled this duty that we freely undertook at our ordination. While the laity have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in the world through their very lives, we

have that same responsibility as well as the responsibility to more explicitly preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let me reiterate, however, that the priest's life, perhaps even more than that of the deacon I mentioned earlier, **must** reflect what he preaches. Otherwise, his preaching will be reasonably rejected by those he attempts to convert; we, as priests, must be converted and convicted ourselves before we can hope to lead others to conversion.

With that, allow me to return to my reflection on the sanctuary, itself, as a sign of the triple *munera* of the priest. Obviously, the clear sign of the prophetic role is the ambo. From there, we proclaim the Gospel, and we fulfill our role of teaching the Gospel as we preach each day (or at least each Sunday) to the People of God.

Finally, let's talk about the priest's participation in the royal or kingly office of Christ. In the case of the ordained priesthood, we should add the term "shepherd." The priest is entrusted with shepherding the people of God, in cooperation with his bishop. We can divide the priest's role under this *munus* into two tasks. First, the priest helps the faithful entrusted to him to live out their own vocation – both their primary vocation to holiness and their personal vocations to sanctify the world in unique and varied ways. He does this through his faithful execution of the other two *munera*. He strengthens the laity entrusted to him through the sacramental life and gives them the knowledge to live in a Christian manner through his preaching and teaching. Sometimes, this will take the form of correcting or admonishing those entrusted to him. This will probably not make us particularly popular, at least in the short term, but we must always be prepared, in charity and truth, to guide our flock to keep them on the Christian path. Second, he exercises this office in his care for the poor and downtrodden, especially those within his own parish. As priests, we can guide ourselves by making sure that our leadership, our shepherding, is always ordered to making a genuine Christian community on earth that points to our true home

in heaven. In the sanctuary, we see a sign of the royal office of the priest in the chair from which he presides at the liturgy.

As we did with the diaconate, let's take a few minutes to look at signs of these three *munera* in the ordination rite for the priests. As with the deacons, the priest's charges are represented in actions of the ordination.

Because, in many ways, it is the central role of the priest, sacerdotal or priestly *munus* is among the most pronounced in his ordination. Whereas the Book of the Gospels is given to the deacon, representing his central role of proclaiming the Gospel in the liturgy, the priest is handed the bread and wine, the "oblation of the holy people" (RO 135) which the priest, in the name of the Church, the People of God, will offer, once they have become the body and blood of Christ, in the Sacrifice of the Mass. In older interpretations, this handing on of the implements of his ministry was seen as the central efficacious act of the ordination. That is to say, whereas we understand the form of the sacrament that actually effects the change in the man to be the laying on of hands and prayer of ordination, in the past, it was the opinion that the actual change in a man to mark him with the indelible mark of priesthood happened when he was given the bread and wine in the rite.

Just as with the deacon, the promises that the priest makes reflect his sacerdotal *munus*.

Do you resolve to celebrate faithfully and reverently, in accord with the Church's tradition, the mysteries of Christ, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people?

If you recall, when I mentioned the similar promise in the diaconal ordination, I pointed out the centrality of the Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer he was now undertaking officially with and for the Church and the entire People of God. The priest receives an additional charge to celebrate the

Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, “the source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 10, CCC 1324) and Reconciliation, the principle Sacrament of Healing he will offer to the People of God.

I should also mention that the sacerdotal role of the priest is highlighted in the prayer of ordination itself:

Together with us,
 may they be faithful stewards of your mysteries,
 so that your people may be renewed in the waters of rebirth
 and nourished from your altar;
 so that sinners may be reconciled
 and the sick raised up.
 May they be joined with us, Lord,
 in imploring your mercy
 for the people entrusted to their care
 and for all the world. (RO 131)

The priest’s prophetic role doesn’t have a moment in the ordination that is quite as explicit as the deacon receiving the Book of the Gospels. He has already assumed the diaconal prophetic role, and that does not end when he becomes a priest. The uniqueness of the priestly prophetic role is that he will be entrusted with the **primary** responsibility as the proclaimer of the Gospel. As such, it is closely tied to his shepherding office. It does make sense to highlight the prophetic *munus*’ moment in the ordination prayer.

May they be worthy 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. (RO 131)

Here, the bishop prays that, not only will we have the strength and courage to always preach the Gospel, an act which takes increasing courage in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Gospel, but that our preaching of the Gospel will “bear fruit in human hearts and reach even to the ends of the earth” (RO 131). This last part echoes the quote from Mark’s Gospel in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* I read a few minutes ago.

Finally, the priest promises to fulfill the prophetic *munus* in his promises. The bishop asks, “Do you resolve to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith?” (RO 124) In that promise, we, when we were ordained priests, promised to cooperate with our bishop in preaching, teaching, and carrying on the Catholic faith.

The Rite of Ordination of Priests, also includes symbols of the shepherding office of the presbyterate, their participation in the kingly or royal *munus* of Christ. Just as in his diaconal ordination, the priest’s promise of obedience and acceptance into the hierarchical structure of Holy Orders points to his royal *munus*. I previously pointed out that the priestly and prophetic *munera* of the priest are ordered to the shepherding of their flock. This fact is highlighted in the prayer of ordination when the bishop prays, “And so may the full number of the nations, gathered together in Christ, be transformed into your one people and made perfect in your Kingdom.” This also reflects that responsibility of the priest to work to make the world into a genuine Christian community that I mentioned earlier.

The first promise that the priest makes also points to this ordering of his office and ministry to his responsibility to shepherd the People of God. “Do you resolve, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank, as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock?”

V. Order of the Episcopate

Now, let us turn to the Order of the Episcopate, the bishops. You will hear the bishop referred to as the successor of the apostles. That means that the apostles were the first bishops. In the Scriptures, they were called the *episkopoi*, the overseers. Their job was to sanctify the community in worship, teach the Gospel to the entire community, and order the affairs of the

Church. In the two thousand years of the Church, each local church (what we think of as a diocese) was headed by one of these overseers. In Scripture, we see Paul handing on the local churches he founded to Timothy and Titus to carry on as bishops after him. The apostles had a unique role in the history of the Church. They received a special personal call from Jesus. They were his inner circle of followers. They were the first-hand recipients of the life, teaching, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. As such, they were in a unique position to preach and teach not only what they received, but what they saw, what they witnessed with their own eyes. The Council Fathers at Vatican II rightly taught the importance of the passing on of this office:

That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the Gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors.

For they not only had helpers in their ministry, but also, in order that the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate cooperators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves, recommending to them that they attend to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit placed them to shepherd the Church of God. They therefore appointed such men, and gave them the order that, when they should have died, other approved men would take up their ministry. (LG 20)

The bishop serves as the chief priest, prophet, and shepherd of his diocese. Remember, the other orders of the ordained minister function only insofar as they are extensions of the bishop and under his guidance and authority.

The bishop's participation in the priestly *munus* of Christ is similar to that of the priests with whom he works to extend his ministry throughout his diocese.

A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood," especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. (LG 26)

It is in being united to the Bishop, and the priestly office he exercises that the Church is present in each diocese throughout the world. That is why it is so important to make sure that we as priests, deacons, and members of the laity remain in communion with our bishop. That's why we even pray for that communion in every Mass.

The bishop has an even greater responsibility to the prophetic or preaching ministry than the priest. Not only is his geographical responsibility greater than that of the priests who cooperate with him, but they are also endowed with the "authority of Christ" (LG 25) when they teach. My fellow priests, it is in only teaching and preaching in communion of heart and mind with our bishop that we can claim that authority. I should also mention that the bishops participate in the Church's charism of infallibility when they teach with one voice in union with the Pope and each other. That can take place through tradition (those things they have always taught) and through Councils. The charism is explained by the Council Fathers like this.

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held. (LG 25)

Let's take just a moment to talk about the shepherding, the ruling, office of the bishop. I really spoke about that when I introduced our section about the bishop, but I want to share, like I have with the other orders, what the Council Fathers said about his responsibility in this area.

Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them by their counsel, exhortations, example, and even by their authority and sacred power, which indeed they use only for the edification of their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that he who is greater should become as the lesser and he who is the chief become as the servant. This power, which they personally exercise in Christ's name, is proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately regulated by the supreme authority of the Church, and can be circumscribed by certain limits, for the advantage of the Church or of the faithful. In virtue of this power, bishops have the sacred right and the duty before the Lord to make laws for their subjects, to pass judgment on them and to moderate everything pertaining to the ordering of worship and the apostolate. (LG 27)

The Council Fathers go on to remind us that the authority of the bishop does not come as “vicars” of the pope. While the priests can be said to carry shepherding authority by virtue of their connection to the bishop, the authority of the bishop over his diocese comes from Christ, through his ordination and the Church’s entrusting him with that diocese.

As with the other two orders, we are going to take a few minutes to talk about the symbols of his participation in the triple *munera* of Christ.

Remember, bishops are already priests, so we don’t need to re-ordain them as priests. Instead, in his ordination as a bishop, he receives the fullness of Holy Orders, a path that began when he was ordained a deacon. The clearest sign of his participation in Jesus’ priestly *munus* is his anointing and the prayer that accompanies it. While the bishop is anointed with Sacred Chrism, on his head rather than his hands like the priests, the following prayer is said (which is why I am specifically connecting this sign to the priestly *munus*:

May God, who made you a sharer of the High Priesthood of Christ, himself pour out upon you the oil of mystical anointing and make you fruitful with an abundance of spiritual blessings. (RO 49)

The prophetic office of the bishop is expressed in the gesture during the Prayer of Ordination. During that prayer for the other two orders, the man just kneels, and the bishop prays over him with extended hands. While the prayer is said during the ordination of the bishop, the Book of the Gospels is held over his head. A few minutes later in the Rite of Ordination, the bishop is handed on the book of the Gospels similarly to that of the deacon. He is admonished to “Receive the Gospel and preach the word of God with all patience and sound teaching” (RO 50).

Perhaps the central *munus* for the bishop is his shepherding authority over his diocese. Remember I said this is unique to the bishop in that his authority is not an extension of another’s authority, but it is an authority he has from Christ through his ordination. Hence, it makes sense that several of the signs within his ordination point to this aspect of his ministry. I am not going

to add much commentary to each of these because I think the Church does better than I could ever do in the exhortations she gives in the rite to explain the actions.

First, he receives his episcopal ring, which signifies his fidelity and communion with the Church who has entrusted him with a diocese. As he received the ring, the ordaining bishop says, “Receive this ring, the seal of fidelity: adorned with undefiled faith, preserve unblemished the bride of God, the holy Church” (RO 51). Next, if he’s a metropolitan (an archbishop – which Bishop Choby is not, but I want to include this as one of the signs of pastoral ministry in the episcopal ordination), the pallium is placed on the new bishop’s shoulders with this exhortation:

Receive the pallium brought from the tomb of Saint Peter, which we now hand on to you in the name of the Roman Pontiff, Pope N. Let it be a sign of your authority as metropolitan to wear within the bounds of your ecclesiastical province; let this pallium be for you a symbol of unity, a sign of communion with the Apostolic See, a bond of charity, and a spur to courage. (RO 52)

Next, the new bishop has the miter put on his head with the words, “Receive the miter, and may the splendor of holiness shine forth in you, so that when the chief shepherd appears you may deserve to receive from him an unfading crown of glory” (RO 53).

Finally, the new bishop receives his crozier, the most explicit and obvious sign of his pastoral responsibilities and invited to be seated in his cathedra (if the ordination is taking place in his own cathedral) symbolizing his authority to rule. The crozier is handed on to the new bishops with these words: “Receive the crosier, the sign of your pastoral office: and keep watch over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as Bishop to govern the Church of God” (RO 54).

With all of these signs in the bishop’s ordination rite, the importance the Church places on his shepherding role is undeniable.

VI. Conclusion

Let's return to *Lumen Gentium*. "Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (LG 10). I hope the last hour has helped you to appreciate better the relationship between the participations in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Both the common priesthood and ministerial priesthood have their own proper participation in Christ's threefold *munera* of priest, prophet, and king. We honor the dignity of all of these participations best not by muddying their distinctions and individual dignities, but by holding up in each their own proper participations in that priesthood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.