

May 3, 2026—Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Holy Spirit continues to direct the apostles in the development of the early Church, as we see in today's First Reading. As the Church grew in numbers, the apostles needed help; there was a growing need for works of charity. They wanted to continue their ministry of preaching and the sacraments, so they decided to extend the Sacrament of Holy Orders to include deacons.

There was certainly precedent to this in the Old Testament. There were three levels in the priesthood of Aaron: the High Priest, priests and Levites. In the Priesthood of Jesus, the apostles were the priest-bishops who would later appoint priests to assist them as they went from city to city spreading the Catholic faith. In English, the New Testament uses the word "elder" to designate those left by the apostles to guide the local Church, but this word doesn't just mean an old man; it is translating the Greek word "presbyteros", which means priest. The apostles and their successors, as bishops fulfill the role of High Priest, the presbyters, the role of priest, the deacon, the role of the Levite.

The First Reading told us that after the first 7 deacons were chosen for this ministry, the apostles prayed and "**laid hands upon them**". This is the ancient gesture of ordination. When I was ordained a transitional deacon by Cardinal Carberry, and a year later a priest, by Archbishop May those bishops laid their hands upon my head. Not only did these first 7 deacons, assist in works of charity for the widows, but also in preaching the Gospel and baptizing. The deacon Philip instructed and baptized the Ethiopian he encountered travelling in his chariot one day reading the Prophet Isaiah. They were indeed holy men inspired by the Holy Spirit and healed the sick and suffering. St. Stephen became the first martyr in the Church when he was stoned to death, while a certain man named Saul looked on.

Whether our role in the Church is that of the clergy or consecrated religious or the lay faithful, St. Peter called each of us to be living stones of the Church. He wrote, in the Second Reading, "**Come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**" There are two kinds of priesthood in the Catholic Church, the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful. The main work of a priest is to offer sacrifice to God. The ministerial priest offers the bread and wine, which becomes the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ in the Holy Mass to the Heavenly Father. This is the most

pleasing and perfect sacrifice. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice on Calvary are one and the same. What is the sacrifice of the priesthood of the faithful? You and I offer our prayers, works, sufferings and joys along with Jesus' sacrifice in the Holy Mass. We should place our hearts and good deeds upon the altar at the Offertory. When joined to Jesus we become a pleasing sacrifice to God. If you don't do this consciously, you are missing a large part of the meaning and power of the Mass.

The sacraments and the Catholic faith are all about participation in the life of God through Jesus Christ. We are saved by the grace of Jesus, first through baptism. That is only the beginning; the other sacraments, daily prayer, as well as our crosses and the work of each day that we do for our families and the good of others, is meant to transform us into the image of Jesus. The prayers and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the Holy Souls in Purgatory and our brothers and sisters on earth are meant to help us participate more fully in the life of Jesus. They don't take anything away from our love of Jesus, they only lead us closer to Him.

At the Last Supper, Thomas expressed to Jesus that they did not know where He was going when He said He would leave them for a time. Jesus responded, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** There is no other way to reach heaven except through faith in Jesus Christ which unites us to Him. No other prophet or teacher can open the door to heaven for us. Other religions may claim to do so, but these words of Jesus are definitive.

Next, Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. He wanted to see a glorious vision like Elijah in the Old Testament. Jesus sounded disappointed: **"Have I been with you so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."** Jesus was the image of God, in the flesh. They didn't need to see an overwhelming vision of Almighty God to know Him. Jesus, in His words and deeds, the way He prayed, the way He dealt with people, including His enemies, was the living picture of the invisible God.

Even though we do not expect to see the Face of God in this world, we will see Him Face to face in heaven. Jesus began this Gospel passage with such comforting words. We need to remember them amid the turmoil of this world: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?"** This a beautiful

image of heaven. Heaven is not just a state of consciousness or floating above the clouds, it is home. All the love and family and meaning of home will be fulfilled in heaven. There we will live without sin or strife or bitterness as one great family in the love and joy of the Blessed Trinity. We will be home at last!