



Introduction

A shepherd is someone who tends, herds, feeds, and guards a flock of sheep. Shepherds usually own nothing and are hired hands to care for the sheep on behalf of the owner. Shepherds are merely servants. Priests are shepherds. They care for God's flock, the Church, and serve the sheep.

God's purpose for priests

In the Old Testament, God consecrated priests to teach, celebrate Liturgy and offer atonement for sins. Catholic priests also tend to God's people by performing the same three duties. This separates priests from non-Catholic ministers who teach, but only offer worship services not Liturgy, and do not offer sacramental atonement for sins. Jesus is our High Priest. Catholic priests represent Jesus and continue the priestly traditions of the old order.

Priesthood was ordained by Jesus

"Christ is the source of all priesthood" (Catholic Catechism, 1548). Jesus gave His apostles power to preach and heal (Luke 9:1-25) and to forgive sins (John 20:22-23). In the Old Testament, the consecration of priests included the washing of feet (Exodus 40:11-14). When Jesus washed the Apostle's feet, he ordained them as priests. This is why He said to Peter *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* (John 13:8) The Church continues God's traditions by the washing of feet and laying on of hands. The priestly line of ordination has been unbroken by the laying on of hands from Jesus to His apostles down to every ordained priest today.

Why aren't women priests?

Priests stand "in persona Christi", the person of Christ, a man. Jesus always referred to himself as the bridegroom (male) and His Church as the bride (female). The priesthood is not a position of power or honor, but one of service. Women are not considered lower in the Church and they are highly regarded for their service, as figures of Mary.

Can we call priests "father"?

Yes, we can. "call no man father" (Matthew 23:9)? The Greek text actually says *"do not be called 'father'"*. Jesus also said do not be called 'Rabbi' or 'teacher'. Yet, Bible literalists have no problem with these terms. Even Peter and Paul refer to themselves as teachers and fathers in their letters... Notably, *"I became your father in Christ"* (1 Corinthians 4:14). Jesus was simply saying be humble, unlike the Pharisees, and do not seek titles of honor.

Priests are still human

Priests are not protected from sin. *"The presence of Christ in the priest is not to be understood as if the priest were preserved from all human weaknesses, the spirit of domination, error, even sin."* (Catholic Catechism, 1550). *"strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter"* (Matthew 26:31). Evil tries to destroy the Church by destroying our shepherds. **Pray for all priests...**for strength against temptations of the flesh that would defile our Holy Church. And also keep in mind *"the priest's sin cannot impede the fruit of grace"* (Catholic Catechism, 1550).

We are a royal priesthood

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) Ministerial priests are our shepherds and they administer the Sacraments. But we, as the royal priesthood, have the duty to go into the world and "proclaim the good news". We are the shepherds of the world, not our priests. We have a higher responsibility to lead others to Christ by our words and deeds, while our priests tend to our spiritual needs and renew us for spiritual battle.

Meditation:

- What does it mean to me that Jesus ordained the priesthood as a continuation of Old Testament priesthood?
- Does my attitude towards "sinful" priests administering the Eucharist and sacraments need to change?
- Have I been fulfilling my role in the royal priesthood by proclaiming the good news?