

Bishops: Their Role and Responsibilities

Objective: What do you know about your bishop? His role is to teach, to govern, and to sanctify.

Now think about the magnitude of that responsibility being taken on by an individual, someone who is considered in a direct line with the apostles, called to preach the message of Christ. It certainly is a weighty mantle to carry and one that demands great intellect, confirmation, and compassion. Our media frenetic world, as we have painfully seen in recent times, provides fertile ground for pundits to be critical of the church, particularly it's leaders. What should we be doing to best understand and support bishops who courageously and compassionately promote the message of Christ?

Song Suggestion: Servant Song (Handout)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

1 Timothy 3:1

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

Titus 1:7

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain.

Catechism 880

When Christ instituted the Twelve, "he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them." Just as "by the Lord's institution, St. Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a single apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another."

Catechism 888

Bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task "to preach the Gospel of God to all men," in keeping with the Lord's command. They are "heralds of faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers" of the apostolic faith "endowed with the authority of Christ."

Catechism 893

The bishop is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood," especially in the Eucharist which he offers personally or whose offering he assures through the priests, his co-workers. The Eucharist is the center of the life of the particular Church. The bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and work, by their ministry of the word and of the sacraments. They sanctify her by their example, "not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock." Thus, "together with the flock entrusted to them, they may attain to eternal life."

Catechism 894

"The bishops, as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular Churches assigned to them by their counsels, exhortations, and example, but over and above that also by the authority and sacred power" which indeed they ought to exercise so as to edify, in the spirit of service which is that of their Master

Saint: St. Charles Borromeo 1538-1584

Archbishop Borromeo made his mission reform and the restoration of integrity to the Catholic Church.

[catholic.org - St Charles Borromeo - https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=212](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=212)

Vignette: – Pat was justifiably proud when he was asked by his nephew to be his Confirmation sponsor. As Pat went through the modest preparation for the role, he looked forward to the Confirmation ceremony. What he was not prepared for was the compelling message of the bishop for his nephew and his classmates....and their sponsors! The bishop was not the austere vicar he expected. Instead he witnessed a thoughtful and articulate leader. The bishop was a humble yet confident man with a stirring call to look inside, be open to the Holy Spirit and go forth to evangelize. Pat realized that he previously perceived the bishop and his message to be distant, apart from Pat and his faith. Maybe he needed to ramp up his focus and do a better job “following” the local shepherd.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Have you given thought and consideration to the formation of a bishop? Also, the bishop’s requisite commitment to making the members of a diocese, “family,” and the responsibilities of being a good shepherd?

What do you do to actively follow the teaching and governing actions of your Bishop? Do you “go to the source,” his actual communication?

Can Catholics disagree with the public policy positions of bishops?

Can you share a personal story of a bishop’s action that supports his role of teaching, governing and sanctifying?

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Are you familiar with the issues that are being considered by the US Catholic Conference of Bishops? Do you take time to understand the actions that the bishops are calling Catholics to take? Do you defend those practices when given the opportunity?

Action Plan:

Make a point of reading the regular messages of our archbishop in the Catholic Telegraph and other diocesan publications. Be sure your conversations on church leadership are fact based and thoughtful rather than regurgitated opinion pieces.

Author: Reid Rooney

Additional Resources:

[Youtube: Role of Bishops](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-yezha5_Fc

[US Catholic Conference of Bishops Site](#)

<http://www.usccb.org/about/communications/social-media-guidelines.cfm>

[Letter from Pope Francis to USCCB - January 2019](#)

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190101_lettera-vescovi-usa.html

[Article - Faith in the Public Arena](#)

<https://www.crookston.org/commentary/faithinthepublicarena/1324-can-catholics-disagree-with-the-public-policy-positions-of-bishops>

Book Suggestion: The Gift of Peace by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

Bernardin's poignant recounting of the final years of his life discovering the great gift of inner peace amidst tragedy.