

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about papacy and clergy

俗

Putonghua pronunciation: *su2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juk6*

Meanings: vulgar, worldly, mundane, laity

俗 (radical 亻 = 人 *ren2*, people) means 俗世 (*su2 shi4* = mundane/ordinary~world): 習俗 (*xi2 su2* = habits~ordinary = folk custom), 俗語 (*su2 yu3* = folk~saying/idiom), 低俗 (*di1 su2* = low~vulgar/unrefined).

In religion, 俗 means 在家人 (*zai4 jia1 ren2* = living-at~home~people), i.e. 平信徒 (*ping2 xin4 tu2* = ordinary/plain~believers = laity), unlike 僧尼 (*seng1 ni2* = monks~nuns), i.e. 出家人 (*chu1 jia1 ren2* = leave~home~people = clergy).

Clergy are also 凡夫俗子 (*fan2 fu1 su2 zi3* = mortal~men~mundane~sons = ordinary people). Handling 俗務 (*su2 wu4* = everyday/mundane~affairs), they must resist 俗念 (*su2 nian4* = vulgar~thoughts): 貪 (*tan1*, greed), 淫 (*yin2*, lasciviousness). Some disillusioned clergy 還俗 (*huan2 su2* = return-to~laity = give up monk~/nun~/priesthood).