

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

聖

Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sing3*

Meanings: divine, holy, sacred, saint, saintly

聖 (耳 *er3*, ear + 口 *kou3*, mouth + 王 *wang2*, king) suggests kingly/divine listener/speaker, i.e. god/saint. Catholics read 聖經 (*sheng4 jing1* = holy~scriptures/bible), worship 聖三一 (*sheng4 san1 yi1* = holy~three~one = the Holy Trinity: 聖父 *sheng4 fu4* = Holy~Father, 聖子 *sheng4 zi3* = Holy~Son/Jesus, 聖神 *sheng4 shen2* = Holy~Spirit), 聖母 (*sheng4 mu3* = holy/Jesus' mother, Mary).

領聖洗 (*ling3 sheng4 xi3* = receiving-holy~baptism), 守聖餐 (*shou3 sheng4 can1* = follow-holy~feast = observing Holy Eucharist/Communion) are 聖禮 (*sheng4 li3* = holy~sacraments).

聖伯多祿 (*sheng4 Bo2 Duo1 Lu1* = St. "Pedro"/"Peter"-transliterated) is Rome's first bishop/Pope. 聖女貞德 (*sheng4 nü3 zhen1 de2* = holy~girl-"Jeanne d'rc"/"Joan of Arc"-transliterated) is French 聖人 (*sheng4 ren2* = divine~person = saint).

by Diana Yue