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

宗 (宗 = 祖 wu1, house + 示 shi4, deity) = ancestor/head/mainstream/lineage, sect, respect, follow, return to

Putonghua pronunciation: zong1
Cantonese pronunciation: jung1
Meanings: ancestor, head, mainstream, lineage, sect, respect, follow, return to

宗 (宗 = 祖 wu1, house + 示 shi4, deity) = ancestor/head/mainstream/lineage. Traditional Chinese 宗族 (zong1 zu2 = lineage-clans = extended families) worshipped 祖宗 (zu3 zong1 = ancestral-fathers), stressed 宗旨 (zong1 zhi3 = fundamental-principle) of 傳宗接代 (chuan2 zong1 jie2 dai4 = continue-lineage-link-generations = breeding male heirs).

宗教 (zong1 jiao4 = principle-teaching) = religion. 天主教 (tian1 zhu3 jiao4 = heaven’s-lord-religion = Catholicism)'s head is 教宗 (jiao4 zong1 = religion’s-head = the Pope).

Buddhism’s 宗派 (zong1 pai3 = source-schools-sects) include 禪宗 (chan2 zong1 = chan-sect = Zen/chan Buddhism), 密宗 (mi4 zong1 = secret-sect = Tantric Buddhism). Simple faith believes: 萬流歸宗 (wan4 liu2 gui1 zong1 = ten-thousand-strems-return-to-head/source, i.e. all sects/schools share one origin).

by Diana Yue