

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Transitional Diaconate Ordination

Transitional Diaconate Ordination

Basilica of the Assumption

May 11, 2019

Introduction

All dear friends, gathered for this diaconal ordination: Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes how, in the power of the Holy Spirit and after consultation with the community, the Apostles discerned that they should appoint and ordain co-workers, to assist them in their ministry in the daily distribution of food. The Christian community, made up of Jews and Greeks, was growing rapidly. And while the Apostles must have rejoiced to see such growth, we get the impression that it was more than they could handle. In fact, the Apostles were getting complaints (something I find rather consoling!). Greek converts were complaining that their widows, who were in need of the community's charity, were being neglected.

Prompted by the Spirit, the Apostles chose seven reputable men to assist them, men in good standing who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The Apostles prayed over them and laid hands upon them and deputed them to distribute the resources, the goods of the community, to those in need. It turns out, however, that, in prompting the Apostles to respond to a particular need, the Holy Spirit had something more in mind, namely, the Order of the Diaconate. Indeed, the role of the Order of Deacons expanded, swiftly and organically. Soon, the deacon's the ministry of charity was linked to the proclamation of the Gospel and assistance in the Church's sacramental worship.

Today, these men, Zachary, Jeremy, Brendan, and Evan, your sons, brothers, classmates, and friends, will be ordained deacons. As a successor of the Apostles, I shall pray over them and lay my hands upon them as an effective sign thru which the Holy Spirit will fashion in the depths of their being the image of Christ the deacon, Christ the servant of all, who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life

as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). I shall ordain them to proclaim and preach the Word of God; to assist at the altar of the Lord and in the Church’s sacramental life of worship; and to engage in charitable ministries that affirm the dignity of the poor and vulnerable. As deacons, this is who they will be; as deacons, this is what they will do.

Qualities of Mind and Heart

So now, my brothers and sons, so soon to be ordained, I address you. You are well-versed in the Biblical roots of the Diaconate, in its development in the Church’s Tradition, and in the roles of evangelization, worship, and service which you are about to assume, as you make your way, God willing, toward priestly ordination next year. So, I will not presume to instruct you about that which you already know.

What I shall do is to reflect with you on the qualities of mind and heart which you are to bring to your three-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Charity. And rather than pulling these qualities out of thin air, I shall take my cue from the Opening Prayer, the Collect, of this Holy Mass. On your behalf, this is what all of us prayed for, namely, that, as deacons, you would be “effective in action, gentle in ministry, and constant in prayer.” In this moment of grace and joy, let us reflect on what we have asked God to grant you.

Effective in Action

First we prayed that you will be “effective in action”, that is, “effective in ministry”. This petition covers familiar ground, for your seminary formation is geared to help you become an effective minister of God’s People; but what does that mean? Efficiency and organization are a good start but that’s surely not all we prayed for. We prayed, above all, that your ministry would produce the good fruit of the Gospel in peoples’ lives. We prayed that you will proclaim the Gospel with such clarity, understanding, and prayerfulness that its inspired meaning will resonate in the hearts of God’s People. We prayed that your preaching will open minds to the truth of the Gospel and hearts to the merciful love of the Savior, and that those you serve will be inspired to live as the Lord’s disciples in the world. Whether you minister at the altar or preside at baptisms, weddings, and funerals your single intention should be to draw the worshipping community into the saving embrace of the Crucified and

Risen Lord. In your charitable works, you are to bear effective witness to the Gospel by touching the lives of those in need with the healing balm of God's mercy. You won't be able to solve every problem or address every need, but you can accompany the poor and vulnerable with a transformative love. Thus you will be effective in building up of the Body of Christ and in strengthening the unity of this local Church, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, a unity based on "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

Gentle In Ministry

As you know, a gruff, pompous, or self-serving deacon is a contradiction in terms, for the word, diakonia, has to do with gentle and generous service of others. So it is that we prayed that you would be "gentle in ministry", even as St. Paul urges in today's reading from his letter to the Ephesians: "I . . . a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility, gentleness, and patience" (Eph. 4:1-2). In the same way, the Gospel urges you to be that grain of wheat that dies to produce fruit, that is to say, a deacon whose life is patterned on Christ who died and rose to save us. As you go about preaching the Word, assisting in the Church's worship, and serving those who are in need - strive to imitate Christ. Christ the Lord, who is "meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:29) - it is he who invites you to participate in his ministry. Your readiness to listen, your patience in difficult situations, your willingness to build bridges, and to avoid harsh and cynical speech, your rejection of all forms of clericalism - all this and more is what it means to be gentle in ministry after the example of Christ. Let me assure you, a gentle spirit may be precisely what will open the hearts of those who are disconnected from the Church and alienated from others.

Constant in Prayer

Finally, in our Opening Prayer, we petitioned that you might be constant in prayer. St. Paul, in his 1st Letter to the Thessalonians (5:17) urges us "to pray without ceasing". And, as you recall, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus taught us by means of a parable "the necessity to pray always . . . without becoming weary" (Luke 18:1). The truth is, prayer is essential to ministry for prayer is how we grow in intimacy with the Lord Jesus after whom we are to pattern our lives through a love both obedient

and singlehearted, a love patterned after the Lord's obedience to his Father's loving plan of salvation, a love which, like Christ's, is at once chaste and intimate, reserved and generous. Prayer enables us to grow in intimacy with the Lord whom we are to proclaim, with the Lord whose Pasch we are to celebrate, with the Lord to whom we are to minister in the poor and vulnerable.

In the seminary, much attention is given to your spiritual formation. As deacons, and later, God willing, as priests, I urge to build on what you've been given. Ensure that every day includes Holy Mass, the Breviary, a Holy Hour, and the Rosary. Punctuate your day with prayer, with meditation, adoration, and praise. Seek God's mercy daily and seek it frequently in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and through sound spiritual direction. It is true that you and I are not called to a monastic form of life but we are called to pray constantly, so much so, that our whole life, body and soul, becomes an eternal offering to the Lord. May it be a pure and unblemished offering!

Conclusion

Dear brothers, In this historic Basilica dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption and in the midst of this month dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, I entrust you to her prayers - asking her intercession - that you may always be “. . . effective in action, gentle in ministry, and constant in prayer.” God bless you and keep you always in his love!