

Archbishop Lori's Homily - Institution of Acolytes

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Permanent Diaconate Formation Program

St. Mary Seminary

Jan. 20, 2018

It is a joy to offer this Holy Mass during which fifteen of your number who are in formation to become deacons will be instituted as acolytes. To you, your wives, and your family members, I offer heartfelt congratulations even as I express my thanks to all those responsible for your formation.

Yet, on this happy occasion, might we not ask ourselves a question? I'm going to guess that more than a few of you were once altar servers. Back in the antediluvian days, when I was an altar server, we were called "acolytes". And the principal role of an acolyte, official or unofficial, is to assist at the altar - to assist the priest or deacon in the conduct of the Eucharistic liturgy and the celebration of the Sacraments. Granted, as duly instituted acolytes you will also be called upon to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ to the faithful and in certain circumstances you may be entrusted with publicly exposing the Blessed Sacrament for the adoration of the faithful, though not with Benediction itself.

So, how should we regard today's celebration? Are we merely making you "official" altar servers? Or is this Ministry of Acolyte to be seen merely as a step along the way to ordination? Surely neither is an adequate answer. What, then, is the deeper, more enduring meaning of what we do today? The answer lies in the Eucharist itself.

As you listened to today's Scripture readings, I trust that you allowed them to lead you to the heart of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In the reading from the Book of Exodus, Moses proclaimed the Word of God - the Lord's own words and ordinances which were the very foundation of the people of Israel. The people responded that they had indeed accepted the Word of God and that they would abide by it in their lives as individuals and as a nation. This was the basis for the covenant of love, which God entered into with his Chosen People. Yet, it was not to be merely a verbal contract, a covenant of words. Rather, Moses proceeded to offer sacrifice to the Lord, a sacrifice in which two young bulls were immolated. Thus the covenant between God and his people was sealed with their blood. By the blood of the covenant, God's allegiance with his people was confirmed and, in response, the people's allegiance with God was likewise confirmed.

It is not too difficult to see this reading as prefiguring the Gospel where Jesus, the New Moses, speaks of himself as the Bread of Life. In this passage Jesus demands absolute faith in his Person and in his mission, a mission in which the Father draws us to Jesus lifted high upon the Cross so that we might share in his Resurrection. No longer are we to be redeemed by animal sacrifices - rather it is the Lord, God's own Son in the flesh, who gives himself to the Father and wherein to us on the Cross in sacrificial love. This is the Bread of Life, this the Cup of Salvation we receive at Mass, the new covenant in sealed in the Blood of Christ until the end of time. And thus with the psalmist we responded wholeheartedly, "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord!"

As we reflect on Scripture, we are indeed led to the heart of the Mass in which you will be called upon to assist - but now with a deeper faith, now with a richer understanding, now with an intentional reverence and a deep humility. For you are assisting in the central act of salvation history, the greatest outpouring of God's love, the One Sacrifice that brings salvation to the whole world. You may be doing

essentially what you did when you were younger, but now you are doing it now with deeper faith in the Lord Jesus and his mission, with a deeper consciousness of your calling to share in that mission, and with a renewed sense of awe that you have been called to perform this ministry.

As this deeper awareness takes hold of you in your life of prayer and your ongoing formation for the diaconate, you will be filled with a great love for God's holy people, especially the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable. You will want to share with them the living Word of God and you will want to share with them the Body and Blood of Christ. You will bring to them not only your personal love and concern - important as that is - but an even greater gift - the love of Jesus in the Eucharist. Thus I will say to you: "Take this vessel with bread for the celebration of the Eucharist. Make your life worthy of your service at the table of the Lord and of his Church."

May your ministry as acolytes be fruitful as in the strength and grace that comes from the Eucharist you seek to build up the Body of Christ, the Church, to the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. May the Lord bless you and keep you always in his love!