

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Permanent diaconate ordination

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

May 06, 2017

Dear brothers so soon to be ordained as deacons: We have just heard how the Apostles called together the community of disciples to choose 7 reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, for a ministry of service. As a successor to the Apostles, I have consulted those responsible for your formation, and with gratitude to God and the support of this entire community of disciples, have chosen you, dear brothers, eight reputable men, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to serve the Church henceforth as deacons.

In the midst of this Easter season, the whole Church rejoices at your ordination. Moments from now, following in the footsteps of the Apostles, I shall pray over you and lay my hands upon you, thus dedicating you for the diaconal ministry to which you have been called. I shall invoke the Holy Spirit upon you so as to fashion in the depths of your being the image of the Christ 'who came to serve and not to be served, to give his life as a ransom for many.' In the grace of the Holy Spirit may you fulfill this three-fold diaconal ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Charity - worthily, generously, competently. Dear brothers, in this moment of grace, let us turn to our Scripture readings, asking the living Word of God to shed divine light on what we are about to do.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul urges you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received. What does this mean for you and for your families? In Baptism, you were called to become a follower of the Risen Lord, and to be an active member of his Body, the Church. In Holy Matrimony you and your wife were called to become a living sign of the fruitful love of Christ for the Church and of the Church for Christ. Now, in Holy Orders you are called to serve the Church as deacons - that is to say, to serve the Church in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

As you answer this call, I join with St. Paul in urging you to take up your ministry as

deacons “with all humility and gentleness”. In this you will imitate the Lord who is “meek and humble of heart”, who emptied himself, who took the form of a servant and laid down his life for us. I also urge you each day to ask for the grace to assimilate ever more completely the attitudes, the sentiments, and the virtues of Christ; only in this way will the sacramental image of Christ the deacon which you receive through ordination be ‘brightly visible’ as you fulfill the duties of your ministry. In this way you will place your gifts and talents at the service of the Church; you will work to strengthen the unity of the Church so that all might believe, and by your example and ministry help your fellow parishioners to embrace their faith and embrace the Church’s mission to spread the Gospel.

Jesus’ words in the Gospel of John shed special light on your promise of obedience and on the spirit in which you are to carry out your responsibilities as deacons. When Jesus speaks about his own loving obedience to the Father, he shows us that the promise of obedience you are about to make to me and to my successors is much more than a mere assurance of loyalty. Rather, it is a way of living out Jesus’ command and promise in the Gospel: “If you keep my commandments,” the Lord says to you, “you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.” In your promise of obedience, the Holy Spirit draws you into the love of the Father and the Son. Indeed, your obedience to me and to the Church is a concrete manifestation of the love Father for Son and the Son for the Father in the Holy Spirit. In making this promise, you also acknowledge that you did not choose this ministry for yourselves. Rather, you are chosen by the Lord and called through the Church for a three-fold ministry of service deeply rooted in the Lord’s self-giving love.

By remaining in the Lord’s love, we grow in our capacity to love others not merely as we love ourselves but rather as Christ has loved them – with an utterly generous, sacrificial love. This is that kind of love which should define your service as deacons. Thus, before you proclaim God’s Word or preach, spend time in prayer, meditating on the depth of the Lord’s love for us. Allow the Lord to test the quality of your love. Ask him to make you a messenger of his redeeming love. Before you assist at the altar of the Lord, distribute Holy Communion, or baptize, or preside at a wedding, funeral, or a prayer service – spend time in prayer, contemplating how close the Risen Lord draws near to us. When his love fills your heart, you will be a good

servant of the Church's sacramental life. Everything about you will point not to yourselves but to Jesus whose saving deeds are the cause of our joy. And before you serve those who are hungry, sick, in need of clothing, those who are incarcerated, troubled in mind and heart – meditate on how the Lord in his love identified with those who are in need. Thus you will see Christ in those you serve and love as he loved. Your service to the poor will be a proclamation of the Gospel and a manifestation of the sacrificial love at the heart of the Church's sacramental life. You will engage in a charity that evangelizes, a charity that draws others toward the Lord, the Church, and the Sacraments. Your charity must be characterized by personal and pastoral generosity and by an ability to draw others into your works of service.

Let me conclude with three brief observations: First, you begin your ministry as deacons at a time when the Archdiocese is focusing intensely on its mission of evangelization. In your ministry you will serve those who are active in the Church but you must also look to serve those who are inactive, for whatever reason, and those who search for the fullness of truth and love. Second, you will find some parts of your ministry more appealing than others. That is natural but don't succumb to the temptation only to do what you like. There are three parts to your ministry but only one ministry is entrusted to you. Word, Liturgy, and Charity presuppose one another and are inseparable. Third, in your ministry as deacons, do not attempt to "go it alone". Look to your families and fellow deacons for support and guidance. Be sure, also, that you are receiving sound spiritual direction, making good use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and growing in your life of prayer.

And finally, in this month of May, I entrust you, dear brothers, and your families to the loving prayers Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Risen Lord. May Mary pray with you and for you each day and lead you to her Son, the Risen Lord Jesus, who became the servant of all.

May God bless you and keep you always in his love.