

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Saints Cornelius and Cyprian; Deacon Convocation

*23rd Week in Ordinary Time*

*Saints Cornelius and Cyprian*

*Deacon Convocation*

*Turf Valley Resort, Ellicott City, MD*

*September 16, 2017*

Today, both the Scripture readings and the Feast Day give us much to think about and much to pray about, as we reflect on your calling to serve the Church as deacons as well as the ways spouses and families share in and are affected by this ministry. Let us spend a moment “unpacking” some of these riches, beginning with our reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy.

In that reading, St. Paul leads by example. He shows anyone who would claim the name of “Christian” or minister in the name of Christ and the Church what our stance before the living God should be. It is not one of pride and presumption but rather an attitude of repentance and humility. St. Paul writes: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these, I am the foremost. But for that reason, I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life.”

Before his conversion, St. Paul shared in that self-righteous, self-important streak that was the spiritual undoing of the Scribes and Pharisees. After his conversion, St. Paul understood both the depth of his sin and the even greater depth and beauty of God's merciful love. Precisely as a subject of God's mercy, St. Paul was called to proclaim the Gospel.

This might remind us of Pope Francis' motto: “*miserando atque eligendo*” – a compact phrase that is not easy to translate into English, but roughly it means,

“Only because the Lord looks at us through the eyes of mercy are we chosen to serve.” This is the right attitude for anyone who seeks to be a missionary disciple or to engage in any form of ministry, be it lay or ordained. You and I do well to absorb the example St. Paul left us, never failing to begin our day by asking the Lord to forgive our sins and to shower us with his mercies which are new every morning. Let us never neglect to end our day by examining our consciences and asking the Lord to forgive whatever sins we have committed. And let us make good use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we encounter, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our merciful Savior. In these ways the mercy of the Lord overtakes us and we become more and more equipped to be the Lord’s witnesses.

Turning to the Gospel, we hear Jesus speaking to us words of “spirit and life”, so necessary for the ministries in which we are engaged. First, Jesus speaks about bearing good fruit – the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel. Jesus tells us that good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit.

Jesus’ saying builds on the example Paul left us in our first reading. The way in which we become good persons and good ministers of the Gospel is precisely by leading an ardent life of prayer and penance. Doing so enables the Lord to prune away in us all that is unworthy and unholy, lest we become those disciples and ministers who bear the bad fruit of scandal, the bad fruit of alienating others from the Body of Christ, the bad fruit of being indifferent to the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. How important that we allow Jesus to hold up before us day by day a mirror so that we can begin to see how it is we come across to those we serve, so that we become more and more aware of the impact our words and deeds, on those whose hold on life and faith is fragile.

As the Lord’s mercy overtakes us and transforms us from within, we become capable of bearing the good fruit that Jesus wills. That good fruit manifests itself in all kinds of ways: in people returning to the sacraments, in an abundance of vocations, in hope reborn in a prisoner’s heart, new courage in someone seriously ill, a smile on the face of a homeless man, an immigrant feeling truly welcomed, an attitude of love that melts hearts hardened against Christ and the Church. In the end, the good fruit we should hope to bear is the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and

chastity.” This is harvest that Christ wishes us to produce. To produce this harvest, we must do what the Lord commands. “If you love me,” Jesus elsewhere says, “you will keep my commandments.” This is the solid foundation of any ministry worthy of the name. In recent weeks, we have seen two devastating storms that have knocked homes off their foundations, reducing them to a pile of rubble. This dramatizes what can happen to us when we base our ministry on our own preferences or when we listen only selectively to what the Lord tells us through his Church. Let us make no mistake, the rains and floods come upon any of us who take our faith and our ministry seriously. May our spiritual lives and our ministries have deep foundations in the teaching and spirituality of the Church.

This is precisely what Saints Cornelius and Cyprian did in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, in a time of persecution against the Church and division within the Church. In spite of popular heresies that many found attractive, Cornelius and Cyprian were steadfast in bearing witness to the faith. Yet, they were also wise enough to help those who had strayed to find their way back to the Church after a period of repentance. In the mist of their strenuous pastoral labors, both gave their lives in martyrdom.

To those who witnessed the sufferings they endured in their ministry or the violent way in which their lives were ended, it may have seems as if their life and ministry were fruitless or as if their life and ministry rested on the flimsiest of foundations. But things aren’t always as they seem to be. Christ was the rock in which Saints Cornelius and Cyprian were rooted. So too Christ and the Spirit were the source of their fruitfulness. By their patient ministry and by winning the martyr’s crown, they won over many to Christ and to his Church and they have left us a pattern to follow when we face divisions within the Church and trials from those outside the Church.

Let us seek the Blessed Virgin Mary’s prayers for she always leads us to Jesus. May our lives and ministry be rooted in his truth, mercy, and love – and thus bear abundant fruit for the life of the world!