

# Deacons reflect on Word of God

Monsignor James Hannon was a little intimidated by his assignment to preach the homily for the Archdiocese of Baltimore deacons' convocation Oct. 1 in Potomac. The priest, who recently left his pastorate of a handful of parishes in Mountain Maryland to become associate director of the division of clergy personnel for the archdiocese, told a deacon and his wife, who knew him well from his time at St. Peter in Westernport, that it would be a little daunting to preach to a roomful of preachers, since the faculty to preach is one of the ministries entrusted to deacons.

He needn't have worried. He did fine.

He wove together the feast day of St. Thérèse of Lisieux with the theme for the convocation, "Verbum Domini" - "God's Word."

"Really very simply, she sought to serve in small ways," he said, noting that Thérèse became known for her "little way," even though the phrase occurs only once in her writings.

Monsignor Hannon asked the congregation of about 130, made up of deacons and their wives, to read from their hymnals a verse from Marty Haugen's "All Are Welcome," which had serendipitously also been used as the Mass' opening song:

*"Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard, "loved, treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word."*

He emphasized the phrase that called the faithful "words within the Word," and, referring to St. Thérèse, asked, "What word does she say to us?" He reminded those gathered that there are lots of little opportunities to serve, to be the Word of God to those in the community. "They needn't be splashy," Monsignor Hannon admonished.

Reminding deacons of their call to always bring the word of God to others, he encouraged them to "be prepared for the privileged work of proclamation."

The deacons - and their wives, for though only the deacon is ordained to ministry, their spouses share in their formation and their journey of service - immersed

themselves during the weekend in the Word of God. They heard a keynote speech from Sulpician Father Thomas R. Hurst, president rector of St. Mary's Seminary and University in Roland Park. They attended workshops on the Word of God in Culture, in Scripture and in Liturgy.

Father Joseph Muth Jr., pastor of St. Matthew, Northwood, and Blessed Sacrament parishes, addressed the topic of culture, noting, "If we're going to preach the word, I have to be in the community. I have to understand their struggles." He said that inculturation means, "We have to be affected by the people we serve."

During the Scripture session, Sulpician Father Lawrence Terrien, associate professor of systematic theology and director of spiritual formation at St. Mary's Seminary and University, guided the workshop through a reflection on a reading from the Bible and asked the participants to look at the word of God through the eyes of "Jesus in my mind," "Jesus in my heart" and "Jesus in my hands."

Catherine Combier-Donovan, director of the archdiocesan Office of Worship, in "God's Word in Liturgy," provided the historical context for the changes in the liturgy coming this Advent with the new translation of the Roman Missal, for which many deacons will be leading or assisting their parishes' educational efforts. She noted that before Vatican II, one percent of the Old Testament and 17 percent of the New Testament were proclaimed within the liturgical cycle. After the Council, 17 percent of the Old Testament and 71 percent of the New Testament are used, "and by the way they are juxtaposed, there is great meaning."

For the deacons and their wives, the weekend provided a great opportunity to break bread – at the table of the Eucharist and at the meals they shared with their fellows in ministry. It also gave them a great chance to break open the Word. As Monsignor Hannon harkened back to St. Thérèse, such a convocation needn't be "splashy," but in "little ways," it can build up a powerful ministry.

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