

Diaconal Ordination of Michael Rubeling

Introduction

On this very special day, the Lord Jesus calls you and me his friends. What joy this should bring to all of us – to be the friends of Jesus. What a precious gift friendship is. We may have many acquaintances but only a few really good friends. Jesus is truly our friend: he loves us with an infinite, merciful, and self-giving love.

The Son of God has gone to great lengths to win our friendship. He assumed our humanity, bore our burdens, and nailed them to the Cross. In our humanity, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, giving redeemed human nature a place at the right hand of the Father. And it is Jesus, not ourselves, who takes the first step in making us his friends: “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you, to go forth and bear fruit...” In Baptism, the Lord has drawn near to us and has given us a vocation to love, a vocation that becomes specific when we have the discerning heart of a disciple.

My dear brother Michael, so soon to be ordained: many paths and many graces have led you to this moment in your life. I think of your parents and your family who have truly made their home a domestic church where the faith is taught, lived, and passed on wholeheartedly, a home that is radiant with Christ’s love for all, especially the poor and needy. I think of the teachers and priests who influenced your life and those who engage you in the challenges of priestly formation. Today you take a major step in the journey toward the priesthood. As you take this step, I hope you are convinced you are the friend of Jesus.

“Ordained Friendship”

What does it mean, dear brother, when the Lord says to you on this, your ordination day, “You are my friends”? Does it not mean that by the prayer of the Church and the laying on of my hands, the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you and imprint on our inmost being a new likeness to Christ, that of Christ the Servant? Does not your friendship with Jesus take on a new dimension and depth such that you will be a sacramental sign of Christ’s self-giving love?

This is both a great gift and a responsibility. The permanent change wrought in you by diaconal ordination not only authorizes you to minister as a deacon but will remain as an inner conduit for the strength and grace you need to serve as Jesus did, generously and lovingly. How important that you keep this channel of grace wide open through meditation, prayerful reading of Scripture, spiritual direction, and the frequent and fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Growth in friendship with Jesus means you will emulate his loving obedience to God in your promise of obedience to me and my successors. It also means you will emulate Christ's single-hearted love for his Bride, the Church in your promise of chaste celibacy out of love for God's holy people. Growth in friendship with Jesus prompts you to fulfill your ministry not in a minimal and grudging way but in a free and wholehearted way.

Three-fold Ministry

What, then, does the diaconal ministry consist in? As you know so well, it is a three-fold ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Charity. Allow me a brief word about each of these, beginning with the ministry of the Word.

The ministry of the Word includes proclaiming the Gospel, preaching the homily, and providing many forms of instruction in the Church's faith, formal and informal. Your seminary formation is preparing you well to undertake the ministry of the Word, but as you already know, it can't stop there. Being a faithful, loving, and effective minister of the Word requires a lifetime of prayer, study, reflection, honest critiques, and a willingness to improve. In his exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis talks a lot about the homily. He tells us not to give a lecture, not to try to entertain, and not to go on too long. But his most important piece of advice is that we must be the friends of Jesus. If our friendship with Christ is warm and personal not cold and formal, then what we say from the pulpit will flow from our hearts to the hearts of listeners. Then we will be not merely preachers or teachers but witnesses to Word. Friends of Jesus don't ramble in the pulpit or preach a canned homily, nor do they seek to share their private opinion with a waiting world. They speak of Jesus so as to light the path to discipleship in daily life. They speak of Jesus so that all may worship in spirit and truth. They speak of Jesus so that all may serve the poor and vulnerable.

The second facet of your ministry is to serve the Church's sacramental worship—assisting in the Church's Eucharistic liturgy by proclaiming the Gospel, leading the General Intercessions, assisting at the altar, and distributing the Body and Blood of Christ. You will baptize, conduct liturgies of the Word, bring Viaticum to the dying, and preside at weddings and funerals. Here too we are to manifest the beautiful truth that Jesus has called us his friends. We do this by fulfilling our role in the Church's public prayer in such a way that we call attention to Christ and not to ourselves. God's People don't benefit from gimmicks or theatrics but rather from a prayerful and reverent execution of our roles in the liturgy that bespeak Jesus' love for his people and our love for Jesus. The Church's prescriptions for celebrating the liturgy should be "second nature" to us, so that when we are engaged in the Church's sacramental worship, we can truly focus on drawing those we serve into the mystery of Christ's love, there to experience his mercy and healing, there to be nourished and strengthened. This is how all of us, clergy and laity, can truly be and become missionary disciples. How important that we pray *before* we celebrate and *while* we celebrate, so that our lives may give God glory *after* we have celebrated.

The final component of diaconal ministry is charity, which, in the Acts of the Apostles is described as waiting on tables. Your role at the heavenly table prepares you to set an earthly table for those in need. Charity is not an appendage to your ministry as a deacon but is really at its core. You proclaim the Word and minister at the Altar so that you can serve the poor. And in serving the poor you show yourself to be the friend of Jesus, for he told us that whatever we do for those in need, we do for him. When we have recognized the face of Jesus in the poor and vulnerable then we will know that our friendship with Jesus is real. There can be no doubt that Jesus is with us in the poor and disadvantaged – in the City of Baltimore and in all the counties that make up this Archdiocese. Deacons are not the sole providers of charity and social services but the diaconal ministry is to help everyone in the Church to make the connection between what we believe and how we worship with our service to the poor. In a phrase, you are to practice "a charity that evangelizes".

Conclusion

As now we enter upon the Rite of Ordination, I join with everyone here, Michael, in praying that your friendship with the Lord will continue to deepen as you exercise the ministry of deacon and make final preparations for the priesthood. We pray that

your ministry bear the abundant fruit of God's love for the Church and the world!
And may Mary our Queen and the Star of the New Evangelization pray with us and
for us in the sacred moment. May God bless us and keep us in His love!