

Ordination of Permanent Deacons

At the outset with words of welcome I want to combine words of thanks to the wives, to the pastors, to the formation team, to other deacons who have given encouragement and support to the candidates who come here for ordination today.

To the candidates for the diaconate themselves goes my appreciation for their selection of readings from the word of God today, together with their helpful reflections on what these readings mean in their lives.

I understand how these readings illustrate their “profound trust in God’s call,” coupled with their reliance on divine help and support and their acceptance of the great work of charity for which they are being ordained. I quote from their message to me, “The scriptural passages express our desire to love God deeply and completely by actively loving his people. Above all, we wish to have the readings express our deep and abiding gratitude to God.”

(Jeremiah 1:4-9) With the words of Jeremiah, the prophet, our deacons-to-be recognize that their calling comes from God in a call to serve the people of God. Unlike Jeremiah, not all can protest their youth, but with Jeremiah, they can acknowledge that God knows them intimately in all their strengths and limitations. They are ready to go where God sends them, into various parish settings to meet the genuine pastoral needs that have been identified. There they are to proclaim God’s word in teaching that faithfully reflects the teaching God has entrusted to his Church.

(Acts 6:1-7) The words of the Second Reading are helpfully printed in the booklet for the Eucharist this morning. The early Church was conscious of a public need that somehow had to be met. This was a work of charity and administration, in caring for

some of the widows who felt themselves neglected in the sharing of the charitable resources of the rapidly growing community of believers. It is a work that through the centuries has been amplified from service at the table of charity to include service at the table of the Eucharist and a ministry of the word of God.

The role of permanent deacons, as introduced in this chapter from the Book of Acts, had been neglected in the Western Church for many centuries. The Second Vatican Council saw it as a sacramental gift from the God the Universal Church should use again. Thirty-two years have passed since the first Permanent Deacons were ordained for service here.

They, and all Permanent Deacons, can see in our ordination liturgy today a renewed call to live worthy lives, holy lives, willing in faith to embrace the will of the Holy Spirit in all they do. In this also they express their love for their brothers and sisters as they seek to meet their spiritual and temporal needs.

The gift of the Spirit they receive in ordination is God's work, but they must, with the grace of God, bring themselves to savor this gift. They must make time for daily prayer before the Lord, so as to enter into a deeper communion with the source of every grace. Their participation in the Eucharist, their dependence on prayer to Mary, the Mother of God, their love of her Son in the Blessed Sacrament, their faithful praying of the Liturgy of the Hours: all this is part of the prayer that will win God's blessing. Penance, daily penance, spiritual self-discipline is also a part of their calling as disciples of the Lord, who said, "If anyone wishes to be my disciple, he must take up his cross daily and follow me."

Of special importance is the witness they give in their state in life. For those who are married, their mutual fidelity is an enormous grace in our society, so confused and forgetful of the teachings of the Lord. It is, in fact, only in the self-giving love between husband and wife that human sexuality finds its full, legitimate expression.

God grant that their example may be a blessing for others.

(John 21:15-17) The dialogue of Peter with Jesus is so deep in its content. It stresses som