

Ordination to the Order of Deacons

Guy Zidago

Holy Rosary Cathedral

29 December 2017

Dear Bishop Hector Villa of the Diocese of Whitehorse; brother priests, especially those of you who are visiting from elsewhere; consecrated men and women, seminarians; dear Guy, our *ordinandus* to the diaconate, together with members of your family; dear friends of the Neocatechumenal Way and parishioners of St. Patrick's Parish: all gathered here in our Cathedral this evening:

Introduction

During the octave of our celebration of the Birth of Jesus Christ, it is a particular joy for me to acknowledge your applause and “thanks be to God” as signs that you are convinced – as am I – that Guy Zidago, is to be admitted to the Order of Deacons.

He has been prepared for this ministry by his family, to whom I express my sincere thanks, and by the prayerful support of his brothers and sisters of the Neocatechumenal Way in the Côte d'Ivoire, Guam and here in Vancouver. In the long process of his human, theological, spiritual and pastoral formation, I am especially indebted to the *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary and the Catholic Theological Institute for Oceania, affiliated with Lateran University, both of which are in Guam. And, of course, I am also very thankful to the Rector of our own Archdiocesan Missionary *Seminary Redemptoris Mater*, Father Gilbert

Nunez, and to its Spiritual Director, Father Martin Brain; and to Father Abbot and the Benedictine monks at the Seminary of Christ the King in Mission. In the past two years, Guy is the fourth seminarian from the Neocatechumenal Way to be called to the diaconate, and for this I give thanks to the good Lord for this gift to the Archdiocese of Vancouver.

And I would also like to acknowledge my gratitude to Bishop Hector Villa with whom Guy spent several months of his itinerancy and Father James Hughes who has been mentoring our *ordinandus* for the past several months. So many of you present here have inspired, guided and challenged him on his journey.

Commitment to Celibacy

Immediately after my homily, and before proceeding to the Rite of Ordination itself, Guy will make a solemn promise, committing himself forever to celibacy “for the sake of the Kingdom and in lifelong service to God and mankind.”¹ Just as we heard in the Gospel that Jesus was presented to the Lord in the Temple, consecrated to him long before his public ministry began, so it is with Guy (cf. Lk 2:22-23). While Guy is presenting himself to God, handing himself over so as to belong completely to him, he is not alone. It is fair to say that Mary and Joseph will be there beside him, accompanying him through the years to ensure the fruitfulness of his commitment.

¹ Roman Pontifical, “Commitment to Celibacy,” Ordination of a Deacon.

This promise is directed to pastoral fatherhood, to being priest who, in the not too distant future, will be a father to his community.² Celibacy is meant to lead you to serve the Lord with undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32), thereby expressing your gift of self to God and to the people who will be entrusted to your fatherly care.³ Most importantly, “Never forget that celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom means embracing a life completely devoted to love, a love that enables you to commit yourself fully to God’s service and to be totally present to your brothers and sisters, especially those in need.”⁴

² Cf. Francis, Address to Seminarians and Novices (6 July 2013).

³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1579.

⁴ Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass with Bishops, Seminarians and Novices, Sydney (19 July 2008).

Celibacy is also an anticipation, made possible by the grace of the Lord, of the future world of the resurrection, where marriage will be no more. This witness to the life of eternity is especially needed today when so many of our contemporaries think that this world alone is sufficient, and so they close the doors to the true greatness of existence. “The meaning of celibacy as an anticipation of the future, – said Benedict XVI – is to open these doors, to make the world greater, to show the reality of the future that should be lived by us already as present. Living, then, as a testimony of faith: we truly believe that God exists, that God enters into my life, and that I can found my life on Christ, on the future life.”⁵

Always remember, Guy, that “the witness of a joyful celibate is a strong sign of the truth of the Gospel.”⁶

Living Icon of Jesus the Deacon

⁵ Benedict XVI, Dialogue with Priests at the Conclusion of the Vigil for the International Meeting of Priests (10 June 2010).

⁶ Stephen J. Rossetti, *Letters to My Brothers* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press), 54.

Service – this will now be a primary characteristic of your life as a deacon. With the imposition of hands and prayer to the Holy Spirit, ordination to the diaconate imprints an indelible character on the soul and communicates a specific sacramental grace. It configures the one ordained to Christ, who made himself the deacon, the servant, of all. It brings with it a specific sacramental grace: a gift for living the new reality brought about by the Sacrament. The deacon receives a particular participation in the consecration and mission of Jesus, who became servant of the Father for the redemption of humankind.⁷ The ordained man makes himself permanently available to the servant mystery of Christ. His ministry flows from his communion with the Lord Jesus, of “abiding” with him, as St. John writes in today’s Second Reading (cf. 1 Jn 2:6).⁸

As a deacon, you are called to be a sacramental sign for the People of God, what is often referred to as “a living icon” of Christ the Servant, the first Deacon.⁹ As you know, an icon is a visible way of helping a

⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons*, 7, 46.

⁸ Cf. James Keating, “The Character of Diaconal Ordination”: http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2010/jkeating_diaconate_aug2010.asp.

⁹ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium*, Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons (22 February 1998), 5, 11; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directorium pro Ministerio et Vita Diaconorum Permanentium*, Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (22 February 1998), 43: “he [the deacon] is called to be a living sign of Christ the

person penetrate into a deeper reality, in this case into the mystery of Christ the Deacon.

Servant.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “Christian iconography expresses in images the same Gospel message that Scripture communicates by words.”¹⁰ And so, Guy, as a living icon, you are to express visibly and concretely the self-giving love of Jesus Christ. If you do this, you will spur us all on to lives of greater service and justice, and just as importantly, you will remind us of the unbreakable “link between the Sacrament of charity, the Eucharist, and the concrete practice of charity.”¹¹ In you, as in a mirror, we are reminded to serve others as Jesus did.¹² When he stooped over to wash his disciples’ dirty feet at the Last Supper, Jesus gave his followers the command that they were to do likewise. They were to minister to others, even to the point of imitating their Lord in his ultimate act of ministry, the self-sacrificing act of love of laying down his life for others on the altar of the Cross.

Ministry of Charity

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1160.

¹¹ Robert J. Carlson, “The Deacon as an Instrument of Charity,” *Origins* 41:7 (23 June 2011), 106.

¹² Cf. USCCB, National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, 33.

From her earliest days, Christians have understood that the formation of the first group of seven deacons, as we heard in our First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 6:17), means that the Church's ministry of charity is to be exercised in a communitarian, orderly way. They were to be men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (cf. Acts 6:5). In other words, the charitable service which they were to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service. Diaconal ministry, therefore, belongs to the Church's essential structure since it is based on the practice of the early Christian community described in Sacred Scripture.¹³ "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."¹⁴

As a deacon, dear brother, your ministry of charity requires that you search out those who are lost, go out to the poor, the marginalized, the rejected and the endangered unborn, the sick and the imprisoned, the suffering and the dying.

Besides your consolation and support, above all "they need God and [you] we must not fail to offer them his friendship,

¹³ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 21.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 21

his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith.”¹⁵ In the face of the physical, spiritual and religious challenges which people encounter, the only way in which you can truly meet their deepest needs is if you yourself are nourished by your own encounter with Jesus Christ.

If you are not immersed in the love of God, then all you will have to offer is yourself, which will ultimately exhaust you and bore others. But with you as his cooperative instrument, Jesus can lift burdens and free people with his Good News. That is the diaconal service called for by the New Evangelization which you are to foster with all your heart and soul.

Conclusion

As you accept the office of deacon, dear Guy, you should take much consolation in knowing that the presbyterate of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, your family, your Neocatechumenal brothers and sisters, your friends at St. Patrick’s Parish and elsewhere will accompany you with their fraternal support and the prayers they offer on your behalf. Invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they will lift you up, imploring the good Lord that you will be a deacon whose ministry of the Word, of the liturgy, and of charity will bring all of us closer to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 200.

_ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver