

Ordination of Permanent Deacons

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Holy Rosary Cathedral

8 December 2015

Dear brother priests, Deacons Lucio and Mark, those just now elected to the Order of Deacon, together with your wives and families, consecrated men and women, seminarians, brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

What a blessed and historic day this is – and at long last! – in the life of the Archdiocese of Vancouver: the Ordination of these sixteen men now elected to the Sacred Order of Deacons. Not only is this the first group of men who will serve our local Church as permanent deacons, it is the largest Ordination ever held in our beautiful Cathedral. Truly it is a moment of special grace and joy for each one of you, brothers, and for your families, but for all of us as well. We cannot but repeat the words which marked the dawn of our salvation in Christ when the Angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary: “Rejoice” (Lk 1:28). Yes, this evening we rejoice and give the Lord thanks and praise for he is doing marvelous things for us (cf. Ps 98:1) by enriching our Archdiocese, as he did the Church of the Apostles, with “men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) to share in the ordained ministry.

Expression of Gratitude

It is also fitting tonight to offer profound thanks to all those who, for over four years, have been intimately involved in accompanying our *ordinandi* on their journey to Ordination. Above all, dear brothers, I am thinking of your wives and families, the domestic churches where your vocation to the diaconate first took root – for some of you even many years ago, and for others more recently. Yours is a “vocation within a vocation,” a new gift and a new responsibility alongside the Sacrament of Marriage.

Often with considerable sacrifice, they have supported your rigorous program of formation. I wish to acknowledge their invaluable contribution and you know – far more than I ever could – the extent to which their steady encouragement, sometimes their forbearance, and always their heartfelt prayer have played an indispensable role in sustaining the “yes” you have each given to the Lord’s call. Married permanent deacons derive so much of their spiritual experience and strength from living in their families.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to Monsignor Greg Smith. From the very outset, he was been tireless in putting together a superb, if demanding, formation program for the aspirants and candidates. He has spent so many hours beyond what could be expected of any program Director that I can only marvel at all that he has accomplished to ensure that the

permanent diaconate is established in our Archdiocese in an exemplary fashion. Working closely with him have been many pastors, priests and Religious, as well as the Advisory Committee, and the administration and faculty of St. Mark's College: all of these men and women have been extraordinarily generous in offering their teaching, as well as their wise and discerning counsel, at every step of the formation journey.

And, of course, I wish to thank you, dear elect in the Lord, for imitating in your own lives Mary's response to the Lord as recounted in the Gospel for this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Because you are being ordained on this feast, you are by that very fact alone "Mary's men, Mary's deacons."

She had within her heart the faith and generosity to say "yes" to the call of God: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). That *fiat* didn't make life easy for her. Her "let it be" was not only acceptance of a vocation, but also a trustful openness to whatever the future might bring.

Today we thank the good Lord for your "yes." Despite your responsibilities as husbands, fathers and professional men, you are willing to devote yourselves to the service of God for his Church in Vancouver. You are to be for us living icons of Jesus

the Servant, the first Deacon, who came “not to be served but to serve” (cf. Mk 10:45). Your ministry, like that of Jesus, is first and foremost the service of God, expressed in the pastoral care of the people to whom you are sent.

Threefold Ministry of Deacons

Through consecration by the laying on of hands, a practice that originates with the Apostles, and strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit invoked upon them, our deacons will show themselves to be servants of all and helpers of me and the priests of our presbyterate by serving as ministers of the altar, of the word, and of charity and justice.

Ministers of the Altar

“As ministers of the altar, they will proclaim the Gospel in the liturgical assembly, prepare the Sacrifice, and distribute the Lord’s Body and Blood.” They also “preside over public prayer, administer Baptism, assist at and bless Marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, and conduct funeral rites.”¹ They can also officiate at Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, conduct prayer services for the sick and dying, administer sacramentals, and lead popular devotions.

Dear *ordinandi*: whenever you will have the privilege of

¹ Roman Pontifical, Rite of Ordination of Several Deacons.

ministering at the Eucharist or bringing Holy Communion to those at home do so in such a way that the reverence with which you surround Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament may touch the hearts of your people and deepen their faith and their trust in him.

I hope that, with time, the Church's rubrics for celebrating the liturgy will become second nature to you, so that when you are engaged in the Church's sacramental worship, you can truly focus on drawing those you are serving into the mystery of Christ's love, there to experience his mercy and healing, there to be nourished and strengthened so that they can all truly be missionary disciples. Remember to pray *before* you celebrate and *while* you celebrate, so that your lives may give God glory *after* you have celebrated the liturgy.

Ministers of the Word

As sharers in the Church's mission of evangelization, our deacons will also preach the Word of God at the liturgies, as well as be heralds of this Word by providing, among other things, catechetical instruction, adult faith formation, and preparation for reception of the Sacraments.

Dear brothers: you will be able to evangelize only if you yourselves are constantly being evangelized through your personal encounter and friendship with Jesus; only if you allow

Jesus to take ownership of your lives.

And so, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through your prayer, contemplation and study, cultivate a great reverence and love for God's Word as authoritatively handed down in the community of the Church.

Minister of Charity

Because the deacons' ministry is a visible sign of the Church's service to the world, they will dedicate themselves generously to the works of charity and justice in the Archdiocese, above all to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In doing so, they are continuing the ministry of waiting on tables entrusted to the first seven deacons as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (cf Acts 6:2). "The social service which they [the first deacons] were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbour. [As Pope Benedict wrote,] With the formation of this group of seven, '*diaconia*' – the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way – became part of the fundamental structure of the Church."²

They are to bring the marginalized to the Church and the

² Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 21.

Church to those on the peripheries of society: the unprotected unborn, the sick, the abused, the dying and bereaved, the deaf and disabled, those with troubled marriages, the homeless, victims of substance abuse, prisoners, refugees, and street people. Fostering the practice of justice as contained in the Church's social teaching is a duty entrusted in a special way to diaconal ministry.

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Dear elect: in God's Providence, you are being ordained on the day when the Holy Father is inaugurating the Jubilee Year of Mercy and is inviting the whole Church to "render more clearly her mission to be a witness to mercy . . . [and] to live in the light of the word of the Lord: 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (cf. Lk 6:36)."³ In Pope Francis's words, "the Church's primary task . . . is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ."⁴

Yours, then, is to be a ministry of mercy: walking with people whose wounds cry for healing; going out to seek the lost and the hopeless; lifting up those who have fallen; helping others to find the path that God is calling them to, the happiness that he intends

³ Francis, Homily at Penitential Vigil (13 March 2015).

⁴ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.

for each of his children. May you always have the eyes of faith to recognize the face of Jesus himself in the “little ones” entrusted to you.

Never let people “forget that God *forgives all*, and God *forgives always*.”⁵ Mercy is “the beating heart of the Gospel.”⁶

Conclusion

⁵ Francis, Homily at Penitential Vigil (13 March 2015).

⁶ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.

As we continue now with the Rite of Ordination, let us ask the Immaculate Virgin Mary to awaken in all of us – but now especially our *ordinandi* – a renewed desire for holiness: that the beauty of worship may transform our lives, that the splendour of truth may shine forth in our words, and that the song of charity may resound in our works.⁷

Dear brothers: we are proud of you and we are all praying for you: that your diaconal ministry in the Archdiocese of Vancouver will draw all of us closer to the Lord in the family of his Church.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁷ Cf. Francis, Prayer for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 2013).