

# **Ordination to the Order of Deacon**

**Paulos Teckle**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

19 May 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons; and dear deacon-elect Paulos, together with your wife Yordanos, your family and friends, especially those from the Eritrean Catholic community of Vancouver; once again, a warm welcome everyone to this solemn Rite of Ordination to the Diaconate:

## ***Introduction***

It is with immense gratitude to the Lord that I accept your acknowledgment that Paulos Teckle is worthy of being ordained for service in the Church as a deacon. The long journey to Ordination, which began many years ago with the Lord's persistent call, is coming to a conclusion this morning. All along the way our candidate has been lifted up by the support and prayers of so many who have sustained him.

Together with Paulos, I wish to express my particular gratitude to his dedicated wife, Yordanos, the Archbishop of the Metropolitan Eparchy of Asmara in Eritrea, Monsignor Gregory Smith and all those involved in the permanent diaconate program for their selfless labours, and the permanent deacons of our historic "first cohort" with whom Paulos is forever associated. That these, and so many others, deserve our thanks bears public witness to an important truth of the Sacrament: the calling and formation of a permanent deacon is an *opus Ecclesiae*, a work of the whole Church as a community of the faithful.

You have helped form him; you have prayed for him. Now Paulos will be returned to you as a deacon, as a man whom the Lord is placing at your service, so that you may draw closer to God himself.

***Christ the Deacon: At the Service of All***

Through the imposition of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit Paulos will come to share in the ministry of Christ the Deacon, who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28; cf. Mk 10:45). For you, he is to be “a servant of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:10). He will set the table for you – and for others – and he will stoop down and wash your feet – symbolically to be sure, but perhaps really as well.

The ancient third-century text called the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” encourages deacons to take their inspiration from the Gospel incident of Jesus’ washing the Apostles’ feet at the Last Supper. “If the Lord did this,” it says, “then you deacons should not hesitate to do it for the sick and infirm, since you are workers of the truth, who have put on Christ” (XVI, 36). The diaconate commits Paulos to following Jesus with this attitude of humble service, which he will express in works of charity.

When the Apostles called the “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3), those from whom the Church’s organized diaconal ministry arose, they did so in order to entrust to them

the ministry of charity in the community (cf. Acts 6:1-7). Since the earliest days, therefore, the Church's charitable work and fostering the corporal works of mercy has been a defining feature of the deacon's ministry, as it will be of Paulos's ministry.

For the Church to fulfill her mission as the Church of Jesus Christ, she must be diaconal. This ministry is not just an incidental activity to the Church so that she can earn a place among humanitarian institutions and thus be given a voice in the world's affairs. Her works of charity are not a social supplement that is done to justify the Church in the eyes of the world. On the contrary, "A Church that neglected this demonstration of charity, of social and human concern, and the actualization of Jesus Christ's goodness in practical matters would neglect an essential part of her mission."<sup>1</sup> "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity. . . but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."<sup>2</sup>

In the ministry of the diaconate, the Church shows that she accepts this call to service as constitutive of her very nature.<sup>3</sup> Dear Paulos:

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 153.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 133.

making the Deacon Jesus Christ present for all of us means that you must visibly make present and effectively accomplish that mission of Jesus' love for the Church.

What does this entail? What yoke is the Lord placing upon your shoulders today? First of all, as a servant you must daily learn detachment from doing everything your own way. Every morning you must renew your intention to be generous with your life in service of the Church.<sup>4</sup> Among your responsibilities in carrying on Jesus' mission of love for God's people you will:

Care for the sick and the suffering. Visiting them and giving them what no technology and no medicine is capable of, giving them: the presence of compassion and common life; the power of understanding, which teaches them to believe in God's love even in suffering; . . . And you are charged with caring for the poor.<sup>5</sup>

When you serve at the table of the Eucharist, Paulos, remember that it is here that you will find the presence of Jesus, who gives himself to you, so that you can give yourselves to others.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily, Jubilee Mass for Deacons (29 May 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 129.

In the ancient Church, the ministry of the Chalice was assigned to the deacon at the Eucharist as a reminder that his association with the suffering of others – his willingness to suffer with them by consoling, healing and loving compassionately – is anchored in the suffering of Jesus made present in the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup> Be compassionate, a fellow sufferer with your brothers and sisters in travail.

### *Service of the Word*

According to the Church’s tradition, another major task of the deacon is the proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness and in a variety of different ways to different people. We heard the Apostle Paul write to Timothy, his apprentice in ministry: “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhorting, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13).

The deacon is, therefore, an evangelizer; he is at the forefront of the Church’s mission of evangelization. He offers people “the bread of the Word, the bread that gives them meaning, on which man lives no less than on earthly bread.”<sup>7</sup>

Dear Paulos: you can carry out your ministry as an evangelizer in many different ways:

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 136.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 134-135.

Often it can be just a simple word, a king gesture, a greeting. But the most important part of being an evangelist is proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. Proclaim it calmly, joyfully, in all its simplicity and directness. Indeed, today we often hide it under a thousand apologies. So often it disappears in the convolutions of our methods. But we have no reason to apologize for the Gospel. We must apologize for hiding it.<sup>8</sup>

Always let Scripture speak for itself, just as the Church has given it to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We proclaim the Word of Christ authentically only if we do so in communion with his Body. This is obedience: believing with the Church, a thinking and speaking with the Church, and not with one's own opinions.<sup>9</sup>

It is very important to remember that, like any evangelizer, the deacon can proclaim only what he himself has first heard. This means you must love Sacred Scripture; be at home in it; read it from within the Church's living faith.

A deacon can tell others of the Good News only if he himself

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 167-168.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (20 March 2008).

“abides” in hearing it, if he listens so that he can, in turn, be a messenger, giving God’s word to others.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Dear Paulos: we join you in entrusting your diaconal ministry to the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Together with all the holy deacons – Stephen, Ephrem of Syria, Lawrence of Rome and Francis of Assisi – we promise to lift you up in our prayers, so that your ministry will bear fruit for the Kingdom (cf. Jn 15:16) to which God is calling each one of us.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 135.