

Ordination of Permanent Deacons

Easter 6: Friday

Holy Rosary Cathedral

26 May 2017

Dear brother priests and deacons, brothers just now chosen to the Order of Deacon: Richard Chau, Patrick Dwan, and Tony Gray, together with your wives and families, consecrated men and women, seminarians, brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

The good Lord has gathered us this evening to celebrate the Ordination of these three men who will, from this day forward, permanently serve the Church as deacons. It is a gift to them that God has chosen them for this ministry, and it is a blessing for all of us that they have responded so generously, even enthusiastically, to his call.

Dear *ordinandi*: In just a few minutes from now, following in the footsteps of the Apostles, I shall invoke the Holy Spirit in prayer over you and lay my hands upon you, thus dedicating you for the diaconal ministry to which you have been called. By these actions, you will be fashioned in the depths of your being to the image of the Christ “who came to serve and not

to be served, to give his life as a ransom for many” (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. As living icons of Jesus the Servant, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, may you fulfill this three-fold diaconal ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Charity, worthily, generously, competently. You are placing your many and diverse gifts and talents at the service of the Church. You are to work to strengthen the unity of the Church, so that all might believe, and by your example and ministry you are to help the faithful to embrace their faith and their responsibility to share in the Church’s mission of spreading the Good News.

Expression of Gratitude

It is also fitting tonight to offer profound thanks to all those who have been intimately involved in accompanying our *ordinandi* on their journey to this day. Above all, dear brothers, I am thinking of your wives – Louisa, Lynn and Wendy – and your supportive families, where your vocation to the diaconate has been affirmed. This new gift of Holy Orders complements the graces you are living through the Sacrament

of Marriage. Married deacons derive so much of their spiritual experience and strength from their life in the church of the home.

I also wish to thank Monsignor Greg Smith, the Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program, and all those who labour with him, for their tireless labours in ensuring that you have received the best possible formation in collaboration with St. Mark's College. All these men and women have been extraordinarily generous in supporting you and offering their wise and discerning counsel throughout the arduous formation planned for you with such care.

I would now like to offer a few remarks on the liturgical Readings; first from the Acts of the Apostles and then from the Gospel of John, especially our Lord's stupendous words at the Last Supper, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15).

This suggests to me two ideas that are particularly appropriate for deacons to consider: servants and friends, with friendship the more profound reality. Let's now look at

the Readings in this light.

Servants: From the Acts of the Apostles

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 service which the first deacons were 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."¹ This reminds us that the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way belongs the fundamental structure of the Church.

Those entrusted to this ministry were not just any good

¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 21.

men but those known to be and put forward by the community as “men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Reputable and wise were the first deacons, setting the standard for the Church’s choice down through the centuries. Moreover, they were not simply to be servants waiting on tables but they were presented to the Apostles who prayed and, following an ancient Jewish gesture used to set apart individuals for special ministry, they laid their hands upon them (cf. Acts 6:6).

Theirs is a ministry which gives “holy order” to the Church’s life, expressing an essential element of what it means “to be Church.” We are a people called to hear and practice God’s Word, celebrate the Sacraments and exercise charity. While the deacon’s ministry is involved in all three dimensions, in particular, they are entrusted with caring for the marginalized, those on the fringes of ecclesial and social life: the unborn, the sick, the abused, the dying and bereaved, the disabled, those with troubled marriages, the homeless, victims of substance abuse, prisoners, refugees, and street people. They seek out the lost and forlorn, those alienated

from the sacramental life and lift up those who have fallen. As servants of the Lord and servants of the Church, deacons are to foster charity and justice in an exemplary way, guiding us all to such service.

As those who proclaim Jesus, therefore, brothers, you are called to serve, and those who serve proclaim Jesus. The Lord was the first to show us this. He, the eternal Son of the Father, himself became our servant (Phil 2:7). “He became the servant (*diakonos*) of all,” wrote St. Polycarp in the second century.² Those who proclaim him are called to act as he did. A disciple of Jesus cannot take a road other than that of the Master.

² St. Polycarp, *Ad Phil.* V, 2.

One mark of a “good and faithful servant” (cf. Mt 25:21), of a good deacon, is his availability. He trains himself to be generous with his life and to realize that it is no longer his own, but given over to others. Those who serve cannot hoard their free time; they know that time is not their own, but a gift from God which is then offered back to him. Only in this way will they bear fruit. In the words of Pope Francis: A servant knows how to open the doors of his time and inner space for those around him, including those who knock on those doors at odd hours, even if that entails setting aside something he likes to do or giving up some well-deserved rest. Dear deacons, if you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful.³

Friends: From the Gospel of John

In the Upper Room Jesus tells his disciples that they

³ Cf. Francis, Homily, Jubilee for Deacons (29 May 2016).

are not just servants, but invited to something deeper, something more profound: they are called to friendship. “No longer do I call you servants – Jesus said to the Twelve – but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). The Lord makes us his friends. This is the most beautiful part of being a Christian and, especially, of being a deacon: becoming a friend of the Lord Jesus.

Dear *ordinandi*: Especially through your prayer – both private and liturgical, alone or with a community – you will experience the Lord’s love, abiding with him (cf. Jn 15:9). In this way you will learn to love others as Jesus loves them – with an utterly generous, sacrificial love. This is the kind of love which should define your service as deacons.

Thus, before you proclaim God’s Word or preach, spend time in prayer, meditating on the depth of the Lord’s love for us. Ask him to make you a messenger of his redeeming love. Before you assist at the altar of the Lord, distribute Holy Communion, baptize, or preside at a wedding, funeral, or a prayer service – spend time in prayer, “abide” with him.

When his love fills your heart, you will be a good servant

of the Church's sacramental life. And before you serve those who press upon you or are troubled in mind and heart, meditate on how the Lord in his love identified with those who are in need, his "little ones." Thus you will see Jesus in those you serve.

Allow me one further observation. You are beginning your ministry as deacons at a time when our Archdiocese is focusing intensely on its mission of evangelization. In your ministry you will serve those who are active in the Church but you must also look to serve those who, for whatever reason, are inactive. Draw them closer to Jesus, open to them paths of discipleship and work with your pastor to ensure that the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is truly the highlight of the parish and, through the power of its preaching, brings people closer to the Lord himself.

Conclusion

And finally, in this month of May, I entrust you, dear brothers, and your families to the loving intercession of Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Risen Lord. May she pray with you and for you every day, awakening in you a renewed

desire for holiness: that the beauty of worship may transform your lives, that the splendour of truth may shine forth in your words, and that the song of charity may resound in all your works.⁴

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁴ Cf. Francis, Prayer for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (8 December 2013).