

Presentation

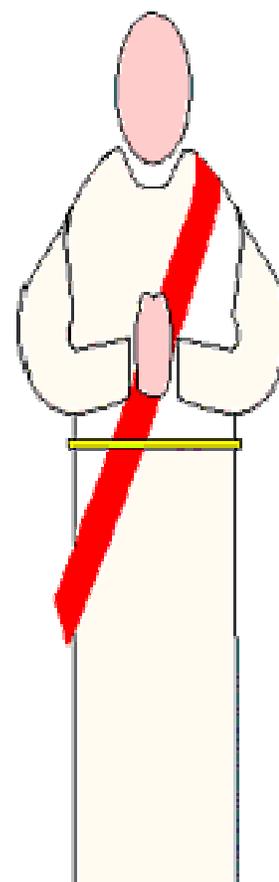
Day of Recollection for Permanent Deacons and their Wives

March 26, 2010

Diaconate Perspectives on Post-Conciliar Documents

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Closing Prayer

“Let them be merciful, and zealous, and let them walk according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all.”

(Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, in Ad Philippenses, V, 2; quoted by Paul Vi, Ad Pascendam, August 15, 1972)

Introduction

It is a great joy for me to meet all of you today, permanent deacons and your wives, for this afternoon recollection, in anticipation to the celebration of our Chrism mass. I want to welcome all of you permanent Deacons and your wives gathered here from every part our diocese; welcome to the headquarters of our local Church.

As I welcome all of you for our celebration, let me take this excellent occasion to reflect on the meaning and value of your permanent and not transitory identity as those ordained not for the priesthood, but for the diaconate (cf. Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*, n. 29). As ministers of God's People, you are called to work in liturgical service, in teaching and catechesis, and in the service of charity in communion with the Bishop and the presbyterate. Our celebration today aims at helping us grasp even more radically the beauty of life in Christ through our ministry.

My presentation today will include a reference to the following documents:

First of all, for historical purposes, the documents of the Second Vatican Council regarding the restoration of the permanent diaconate; then the post conciliar documents from Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Sacrum diaconatus ordinem* of June 18, 1968,

and the Apostolic Letter, *Ad pascendum* of August 15, 1972, containing the Norms for the Order of the Diaconate; for the specific purpose of this presentation, three different documents are added:

From the Congregation for the Clergy, Basic Norms for the formation of permanent deacons (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium*) and the Directory for the ministry and Life of permanent deacons (*Directorio Pro Ministerio et Vita Diaconorum Permanentium*), both from February 22, 1998, and finally, the National Directory for the formation ministry and life of permanent deacons in the United States from the USCCB of December 15, 2004.

In the context of our celebration today, it is appropriate to turn our thought to the theological essence of the permanent diaconate, in order to reflect upon the consequences on the existential level. For the Catholic faith, the diaconate "***is in the Church a specific sacramental sign of Christ the servant***" (Congregation for the Clergy, *Direction for the ministry and the life of permanent deacons*, 22.2.1998, n. 5) in which you have been incorporated with the conferring of holy orders. You therefore have a special status, different from the ordinary Christian condition, with Christ in the service of the Church, and you deacons therefore have the task of being "***interpreters of the needs and desires of the Christian community***" and

"animators of service." (Paul VI, Ap. Let. *Ad pascendum*, Introduction). Your identity is likewise marked by the **permanent** aspect of your ministry.

The spirit of service, key of the deacons' spirituality, is thus conceived of not as a mere exhortation, but rather as something that necessarily follows from theological identity. Thus is related to the importance of the warning of St. Polycarp: that deacons,

"be merciful, active and walk in the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all" (St. Polycarp, *Ad Phil.*, 5, 2, in Funk 1, 300, quoted in *LG* 29).

In this context, for a permanent deacon, conversion also involves reflecting on the meaning of the permanent character of the diaconate. While this obviously means a stable status, not received as a stage on the way to the priesthood, there must be an awareness of the fact that you are always deacons: this is not a negative sign of stability in a lower level. It is a specific vocation to always represent the most noble figure of Christ the Servant. It means permanent union with His kenosis for being its permanent memory; (You know Kenosis is a term that comes from the Greek for the doctrine of Christ's self-emptying in His incarnation; that is to say his complete donation, His complete submission to the will of the Father as expressed in Philipians 2, 6-7). For this reason to serve in the Church as a permanent deacon is an honor and a Joy! You may not know that over half of

the Permanent Deacons in the world are to be found in Dioceses in the United States of America which is also a particular blessing for our country.

The character of the diaconate remains lively, permeating all the aspects of your life, both in the specific exercising of the ministry as deacons and in professional, family, social life etc.

The vocation to the diaconate has an all-inclusive character: it is not a matter of exercising it "**part-time**", but rather a specific mode of your entire existence, lived in favor of the mission of the Church. Your entire life acquires value in the diaconate, and somehow this must also be reflected in your way of praying, your social relationships and friendships, family life, working life, way of behavior, etc.

With the words of the Holy Father, for the deacons the vocation to holiness means the "**sequela (image) of Jesus in this attitude of humble service, which is not only expressed in works of charity, but affects and models the entire way of thinking and acting**" (John Paul II, General Audience of 20.10.1993, n. 2, in *Insegnamenti* 16/2, 1993, p.1054).

One of the signs of the mercy of God that the Holy Father has indicated for the diaconate is charity: it opens our eyes to the needs of those who live in poverty and marginalization. In this

sense, the function of deacon takes on a front line role, since it is a service of charity and has the purpose of helping and promoting all the members of the particular church, so that they may participate, in a spirit of communion and according to their charisms, in the life and mission of the Church.

For the fruitful ministry of charity, there must be a close link with the pastoral authority. Your ministry is an aspect of the authority with which you are endowed by sacrament of ordination; therefore, as required by the unity of consecration and mission, it must be exercised in hierarchical communion with the bishop and the priests. Charity, which we try to practice through the ministry, is also a condition within the ministry, as communion with the Pastors.

Thus, the service of the charity provided to the faithful is anchored in the requirement of charity between the ministers of the Church. If this spirit is lacking, your life of service would fail, and be reduced to a functional task that might fulfill your duties externally, but would not increase your perfection towards holiness or the true ecclesial communion.

I. The Juridical Status of a Deacon

a) Origin

The origin of the diaconate is the consecration and mission of Christ, in which each one of you as permanent deacons of the

Church have been called to share. Through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, every deacon is constituted a sacred minister and a member of the hierarchy. This condition determines your theological and juridical status in the Church as members of the clergy, as clerics, with a specific degree and with particular functions (a function that is not a private thing to do, a hobby to entertain your time or a freely planned activity).

b) Incardination

As we think in your formation process, we can remember that at the time of admission to the diaconate, all candidates shall be required to express clearly in writing their intention to serve in the Church for the rest of their lives in a specific diocese. Incardination is a juridical bond. It has ecclesiological and spiritual significance in as much as it expresses the ministerial dedication of the deacon to the Church.

c) Stability

In addition to this particular connection between every deacon and his own diocese, the specific vocation to the Permanent Diaconate presupposes the stability of this Order, and that is to say that the transition to the Priesthood is governed by serious reasons and upon the diocesan bishop's consultation with the Congregation for Catholic Education with regard to the intellectual and theological preparation of the candidate, and also the

Congregation for the Clergy concerning the program of priestly formation and the aptitude of the candidate to the priestly ministry.

II. The Three-fold Diaconal Ministry

The Second Vatican Council synthesized the ministry of deacons in the threefold "***diaconia of the word, the liturgy and of charity.***" In this way diaconal participation through the ordained ministry in the one and triple *Munus* of Christ is expressed. The deacon "***is teacher in so far as he preaches and bears witness to the word of God; he sanctifies when he administers the Sacraments...; he is a guide in as much as he animates the community or a section of ecclesial life.***" In this way every deacon assists and serves the bishops and priests who preside at every liturgy, are watchful of doctrine and guide the people of God.

The ministry of deacons, in the service of the community of the faithful, should "***collaborate in building up the unity of Christians without prejudice and cultivating those human qualities which make a person acceptable to others, credible, vigilant about his language and his capacity to dialogue, so as to acquire a truly ecumenical attitude.***"

Deacons are ordained to the ministries of the word, of the liturgy, and of charity. It is a three-fold ministry because in the person of

the deacon, these three offices are concentric. What I mean is that they turn around the pivot of Christ the Servant in the person of the deacon. You cannot draw a circle without first fixing the centre where you will lay your compasses. A circle is defined by its centre, just as the three-fold diaconal ministry is defined by Christ the Servant.

a) Diaconia of the Word

If we go back again to the day of your ordination, the diocesan bishop, during the rite of ordination, gave the book of the Gospels to the deacon saying: "***Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become.***" Therefore, like priests, deacons are commended to all by their conduct, their preaching of the mystery of Christ, by transmitting Christian doctrine and by devoting attention to the problems of our time. The principal function of a deacon, is indeed to collaborate with the bishop and the priests in the exercise of a ministry, which is not of their own wisdom but of the word of God, calling all to conversion and holiness. He prepares for such a ministry by careful study of Sacred Scripture, of Tradition, of the Liturgy and of the life of the Church. Moreover, in interpreting and applying the sacred deposit, the deacon is obliged to be directed by the *Magisterium* of those who are "***witnesses of divine and Catholic truth***", the Roman Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him, so as to teach and propose the mystery of Christ fully and faithfully.

This diaconia of the Word implies the learning of the art of communication, the reception of the proper faculties in the diocese, the proper training and preparation for writing and delivering of homilies, the exercise of catechetical duties, be example for others in professional life and have a missionary spirit.

b) Diaconia of the Liturgy

The rite of ordination emphasizes another aspect of the diaconal ministry – ministry at the altar. Deacons receive the sacrament of Orders, so as to serve as a vested minister in the sanctification of the Christian community, in hierarchical communion with the bishop and priests. The liturgical ministry is intrinsic and fundamentally and distinct to that of the priests and the laity.

The liturgy is the source of grace and sanctification. Its efficacy derives from Christ the Redeemer and does not depend on the holiness of the ministry. This certainly should cause the deacon to grow in humility since he can never compromise the salvific work of Christ. At the same time it should inspire him to holiness of life so that he may be a worthy minister of the liturgy. The deacon is also the minister of sacramentals (sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments (and) signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the Church's intercession.

c) Diaconia of Charity

In virtue of the Sacrament of Orders, deacons in communion with the bishop and the diocesan presbyterate participate in the same pastoral functions, but exercise them differently in serving and assisting the bishop and his priests. In the ministry of charity, deacons should conform themselves in the likeness of Christ the servant; diocesan and parochial works of charity are expressed by the service through different movements and organizations with special emphasis in the preferential option for the poor and the youth. The charitable function of deacons also involves appropriate service in the administration of goods and in the Church charitable activities.

Since we have analyzed every diaconia separately, let me make a general comment of all of them. The three offices of the deacon ministry have been analyzed separately. I shall now emphasize that deacons are endowed with special charisms so that they can use one rather than the other. This is human nature. However, this does not mean that the Church must ordain deacons who are only preachers, or liturgists, or administrators. One office does not exclude the others: these are three concentric offices and each deacon should be fulfilled them according to his calling, with a sense of proportion and, above all, acting in the person of Christ.

The diaconate is part of the sacramental apostolic ministry. Therefore, today we can find out the future prospects of the diaconate. We have seen its past experience and present problems as well. ***What are its future prospects? What is the meaning of the personal encounter with Christ the Servant, made flesh now that we are with him?***

Our recollection this afternoon is an excellent opportunity to affirm that our ministry is as ancient as the Church itself. It also shows that we are waking up after two thousand years of profound sleep. Our three ministries are unchanged: we should develop them with a renovated spirit:

- Let deacons be ministers of the Word in the liturgy and through the mass-media;
- Let them be catechists in parishes, in prisons and in public life;
- Let deacons be ministers of the liturgy in all its parts: both those they preside over, and those they do not;
- Let them fulfill their service in every way possible;
- Let them help in every celebration so that communion with Christ and his Church may be strengthened;
- Let their liturgical ministry affect the beauty and fluency of ceremonies, knowing that these are the best contexts for the encounter between God, humankind, and individual men;

- Let them preside over this encounter in the splendor of the liturgy, full of beauty, holiness, and truth.

The charity the deacons practice in the preaching of the Gospel and in liturgical celebrations should be an expression of sincere love. This love is showered on the neediest ones and practiced in the most hidden ways, which are only known to God, because it is in the persons of the poor and the outcast that Christ himself suffers.

Conclusions

a) Canonical Mission

The three contexts of the diaconal ministry, depending on circumstances, may absorb, to varying degrees, a large proportion of every deacon's activity. Together, however, they represent a unity in service at the level of divine Revelation: the ministry of the word leads to the ministry at the altar, which in turn prompts the transformation of life through the liturgy, resulting in charity. These areas should be mentioned as: administration of parishes and also at a diocesan level, educational ministry, pastoral care of the sick, chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons. In a very special way, deacons may also be called to guide dispersed Christian communities in the name of the bishop or the parish priest. This missionary called, by ecclesial appointment, is very effective in those territories,

environments or groups where priests are not available, and therefore the deacons may bring together the community for guidance, education and worship. In the exercise of different offices, deacons are called to exercise judicial, administrative and organizational tasks.

In the exercise of the ministry of law deacons can be effective ministers by serving at the diocesan tribunal as canonical advocates, auditors or judges of instruction by helping and representing people in bringing their cases to the diocesan court.

Numerous canons of the current Code of Canon Law speak directly of permanent deacons: 236; 276, § 2, 3°; 288; 1031, §§ 2-3; 1032, § 3; 1035, § 1; 1037; 1042, 1°, 1050, 3°; many other canons speak of deacons as a way of reference or connection to different ecclesial and theological realities, for example, 1025; 1029; 236, 1°; 1051, 1°; 285, §§ 1-2; 289, etc.

b) Diaconate Perspectives

Ongoing formation for deacons should include and harmonize all dimensions of the life and ministry of the deacon. The completion of a systematic and personalized formation is always encouraged through personal and institutional efforts. Be attentive of integrity in your social activity by developing abilities to communicate and relate to different cultural realities.

c) Spirituality

The universal call to holiness has its origin in the "***baptism of faith***" by which all are "***truly made sons of God and shares in the divine nature and thus are made holy***". By the Sacrament of Holy Orders, deacons receive a "***new consecration to God***" through which they are "***anointed by the Holy Spirit and sent by Christ***" to serve God's people and "***build up the Body of Christ.***" From this stems the diaconal spirituality with its source in what the Second Vatican Council calls "***the sacramental grace of the diaconate***". In this regard it is necessary to remind to deacons to keep themselves in spirit of service, to dedicate part of the day to prayer and formative readings, to practice their own devotions and, to see in their families and communities the face of God through whom He speaks to them.

Since many of you work in factories, firms, government offices, while others are workers, or teachers in Catholic or State schools, and others run their own family businesses, you can get very close to the lay faithful. This is why the Church expects you to practice the virtues that the apostles were searching and found in the first seven deacons. Let us hope that you all will be men of good reputation, dedicated to helping the needy, that you will be virtuous heads of your families, so that you can be the light of the

world and the salt of the earth, continuing the mission of announcing Christ to the world.

You have been called to know, protect, and make the most of your diaconal identity. The Church expects all of you to accomplish your ministry with integrity and to be equally dedicated to the offices of the word, of the liturgy, and of charity.

In current times, when unrestrained consumerism, the materialism of society and the loss of values have caused the spreading of a culture of death, your vocation singles you out as the bishop's irreplaceable arms. Your diaconal ministry, together with the priestly office, is absolutely necessary for the conversion process that we need so much.

Since many of you have received the sacrament of marriage and God has blessed many of you with the birth of sons and daughters, your diaconal ministry gives you the opportunity to be evidence of true families in the world. You must make efforts for your families to be real household churches, being good spouses as Christ is to his Church. It is in your families that you should primarily accomplish the offices of the word, of the liturgy, and of charity.

The 1 Tim 3, 8-13, is presenting to us, not only permanent deacons, but to every baptized who wish to exercise any ministry in the Church, a program of life through the following words:

"Helpers in the Church. Church helpers must also have a good character and be sincere; they must not drink too much wine or be greedy for money; they should hold to the revealed truth of the faith with a clear conscience. They should be tested first, and then, if they pass the test, they are to serve."

"Their wives also must be of good character and must not gossip; they must be sober and honest in everything. A church helper must have only one wife, and be able to manage his children and family well. Those helpers who do their work well win for themselves a good standing and are able to speak boldly about their faith in Christ Jesus."

In order to create an atmosphere of reflection during this afternoon recollection and also, in preparation for the reading and studying of the documents mentioned today, I want you to focus your attention in the following points of medication:

- ***Am I aware of the Juridical status as a permanent deacon in the Catholic Church?***
- ***How do I exercise my diaconal functions?***
- ***What can I do to improve in my diaconal ministry?***

This entire talk is going to be published through our diocesan website and the tribunal website. You are all invited to check it out.

Now, to conclude this session I am inviting you to offer together a prayer asking God for all of us, as ministers of God's Word, for our families and for the people we serve.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Presider:

MARY,

Who as **teacher of faith**, by your obedience to the word of God, has co-operated in a remarkable way with the work of redemption, make the ministry of deacons effective by teaching us to hear the Word and to proclaim it faithfully.

Lector 1:

MARY,

Teacher of charity, who by your total openness to God's call, has co-operated in bringing to birth all the Church's faithful, make the ministry and the life of deacons fruitful by teaching us to give ourselves totally to the service of the People of God.

All:

MARY,

Teacher of prayer, who through your maternal intercession has supported and helped the Church from her beginnings, make deacons always attentive to the needs of the faithful by teaching us to come to know the value of prayer.

Lector 2:

MARY,

Teacher of humility, by constantly knowing yourself to be the servant of the Lord you were filled with the Holy Spirit, make deacons docile instruments in Christ's work of redemption by teaching us the greatness of being the least of all.

All:

MARY,

Teacher of that service which is hidden, who by your everyday and ordinary life filled with love, knew how to co-operate with the salvific plan of God in an exemplary fashion, make deacons good and faithful servants, by teaching us the joy of serving the Church with an ardent love.

Amen

