

Diaconate Ordination Homily
Guthrie Dolan
November 19, 2010

Guthrie Dolan, who presents himself for ordination as deacon, this evening, is probably like most of us who were at one time on the way to priesthood. Our earliest attraction to priesthood was initially driven by what a priest does not necessarily who a priest is.

Thus, institution as lector and acolyte were markers – which one must experience as we move to the ultimate goal which is priesthood. Even ordination to deacon somehow fell within this mindset. Its transitional character was highlighted and it is regarded as the final step – a formal ritual before priesthood is conferred.

But when we examine priesthood from the perspective of whom the priest is – the notion changes. Upon examination, it is realized that the character of deacon conferred upon Guthrie this evening is core to the identity he anticipates one day to experience as priest.

As portrayed in the scripture readings for this evening, the vocation to Sacred Orders of deacon, priest and bishop is predicated on being chosen by Christ. It is Christ who identifies and selects us for this role which is always then confirmed by the Church.

This selection, however, is not based merely on external qualifications we may possess, but especially on a deep, personal love. Jesus' existence is based on the Father's love which is reciprocated in mutuality. This love is then communicated to us who are brothers and sisters of Jesus in the human family.

Being chosen by Christ and what it means is partially illuminated by our human experience. Those of us with minimal athletic ability find our hearts beating as the captain of a pick-up game selects his team. We are finally relieved when we become one of the chosen. We also find great consolation as we become one of a circle of friends who are accepted and loved – which is demonstrated by our being teased, our being comfortable with those who appreciate us for whom we are. And there is the love of family which sticks by us in our joys and triumphs, in our mistakes, sufferings and failures. Indeed, we know what it means to be loved.

As Jesus chooses one for ordained ministry he does so out of love but as we are instructed by today's Gospel we are expected to love in return. This is especially done with the Sacrament of our bodies. A husband and wife express their life gift with the nuptial gift of their total person – body and soul to one another.

Guthrie Dolan tonight promises to reciprocate the love that Jesus lavishes on him by promising to be celibate. Recently, a fourth grade girl came up to me and rather boldly said: "Let me see your Bishop's ring." I extended my right hand and she carefully examined the ring. Looking up to me, she said: "This ring means you're married to the Church."

In promising celibacy this evening, Guthrie, identifies with Jesus in making himself available for the life of the church – marked by generosity and transparency.

Guthrie, by this commitment, also points to the reality of the Kingdom which Jesus has inaugurated. The Kingdom is present as truth, peace, justice and love in our midst. It will be totally fulfilled in the eternal Kingdom, to which those of us who are celibate are called to witness in order to encourage others to pursue its attainment.

In extending an invitation to be a part of those called to be married to the Church, Jesus does so – “that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” Thus, the path of the deacon and priest is that of happiness, of joy. It has been said that “the infallible sign of God’s presence is joy.” Thus, what Guthrie engages in this evening is intended to bring happiness. It is not so much the exhilaration of the moment, but a deeply rooted contentment which is evidenced by ongoing energy and assurance of the Lord’s companionship.

Central to the ordination of a deacon is the presentation of the Book of Gospels. To Guthrie, I will say:

“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.”

The deacon’s role is to evangelize. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelium Nuntiandi* stated: “The Church exists to evangelize.” In evangelizing the Church reveals its deepest identity.

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have emphasized that we have embarked on a time of “new Evangelization.” The second reading pinpoints one characteristic of this new direction. As Philip went out and accompanied the eunuch of the court of the queen of the Ethiopian in journey – so are our ordained ministers called to reach out to people in the circumstances of their daily lives especially at times when they are particularly open to the coming of Jesus.

We are not to await for potential believers to approach us so that we can tickle their ears with our profound knowledge of explaining scripture and its history, background and the meaning of words. Rather, we are called to accompany those seeking God, open up scriptures as applicable to their lives and introduce them to Jesus. The identity of deacon lives on in the priest which Guthrie is striving to be.

On August 13th of this year, I had the great privilege of ordaining 13 very generous men to the order of permanent deacon. To a man, they pointed to service as integral to the identity of deacon. They disclaimed that it meant being “do-gooders” and soliciting the applause of onlookers for such deeds.

Rather for them diaconal service is rooted in one’s heart – that is of permanently being a servant – always there for the benefit of others out of compassion and genuine love.

Their model is Jesus who “came to serve and not to be served.” It is that same message that permeates the ordination of Guthrie as deacon as is always the case.

Thus, for you today, Guthrie, the ordination to diaconate is not merely another formal step on your journey to priesthood but rather internalizing an identity characterized by receiving and sharing the love of Jesus and his Father, of experiencing joy and energy in doing so, and of announcing the Gospel in situations that are primed for its reception leading to conversion. You are ordained a deacon to exercise ministry always with the heart of a servant.

It is a happy day for you, your family and friends and all of us in the Community of the Church of Des Moines. Guthrie, we congratulate you on your receptivity of God’s Grace and all that you have personally invested in responding to God’s call. Be assured of our support and friendship in the continuing journey. We feel blessed to be called to be members of the same team.