

Homily
Diaconate Ordination
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The diaconate was instituted by the Apostles in response to the needs of the early Christian community. Complaints arose that those who spoke Greek felt their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of the bread compared to the attention which was being rendered to the widows who spoke Hebrew.

With the example of service of Jesus still fresh in mind from the washing of the feet, the twelve set about to institutionalize the role of service in the Christian community. Seven men, who were identified as deeply spiritual and prudent, were chosen by unanimous consensus of the first Christians for this role. The apostles prayed over the seven and then imposed hands on them establishing them in this new sacramental role as deacons.

The seven ordained for the order of service were exercising personal gifts which each of us, is called to use as members of the body of Christ. A characteristic central to the community, is hospitality. St. Peter in the second reading exhorts us: “Be hospitable to one another without complaining.”

Hospitality certainly involves, in fidelity to our incarnational reality, provision for our physical needs. This is particularly true as we welcome guests among us and address their hunger, their thirst, their fatigue, their health. Our neighbor is brother and sister, their physical wants require our generous and open hearted attention.

Deep down in the human construct there is also the need to welcome the spiritual reality so each individual feels comfortable in one’s presence. Today, this means receptivity to persons of different racial origin, to various expressions of culture which are embedded in each of us and rooted in the traditions of our origin.

Jesus taught us this way of life with interactions he experienced, namely with – the woman at the well, the story of the good Samaritan, the openness to the poor, the particular love for children, and the curing of the Roman centurion’s daughter. In our day, Pope Francis calls on the church to deliver the message of mercy and compassion to the poor, to those inhabiting the peripheries of society. It is, in fact, opening the doors of hospitality.

In embracing the identity of deacon, Andrew and Luis are called to activate service through the ministry of hospitality. The first hospitality is to each other as they accept one another in terms of their common brotherhood. Their culture, their language, their interests are obviously different but they have made room in their hearts for one another without requiring the other to sacrifice core identity. Their relationship is characterized by mutual respect.

The spirit of diaconal hospitality is then extended to their broader ministry as they reach out to those in the Church they are called to serve. Initially, they will find greatest comfort in being there for parishioners of similar origin. But then they will be called, as they come to know others in the parish to become brothers to all variety of people. They will serve as bridges to the unity that brings us together into the one kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Hopefully, their witness will be influential in helping others develop a growing commitment of unity as the one Body of Christ. For we are being called to go beyond the security of our own comfort zone to embrace the broader body of Christ which relationships, if initiated and developed, will result in remarkable enrichment for all parties. In New Testament terms, the Greek widows and the Hebrew widows were not only satisfied in their physical hunger but also felt at home through the service of the seven deacons responding to their craving to be family. Applied on the macro-scale, we strongly contend the road to peace and security is not through barriers or fences or through stockpiling of armaments and huge military forces but through friendship and mutual respect.

The world to which our new deacons are being sent does not coincide with God's kingdom. Thus, if loyal to their mission, they will not totally experience peace and light. Inevitably, there will be struggle and sacrifice.

Then why bother? Why go therefore? The answer is simple – Andrew and Luis go because of the deep love each shares with Jesus. God wants all to hear the good news and to be comforted by the relationship with their loving God and to have that happen within each person's cultural identity.

Oftentimes, young men considering diaconate and priesthood wrestle with the questions – Am I worthy? Am I really able to accomplish such a demanding vocation of being hospitable in this sense? Surely, both Andrew and Luis faced doubts about their personal weaknesses and seeming lack of capacity for the mission at hand.

Thus, on this day, trust in God's providence is highlighted. Our young men are told to trust in the reality of God's unfailing companionship that is there for all of us. As we go about God's business in using our gifts as members of Christ's body, he is with us. Constantly he repeats, "Do not be afraid."

The words confided to Jeremiah as he resisted God's calling to him bring assurance:

"Ah, Lord God!" I said, "I know not how to speak, I am too young."

But the Lord answered me, saying not, "I am too young." To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.

Then the Lord extended his hand and touched my mouth, saying See, I place my words in your mouth."

The particular message entrusted to Luis and Andrew and through them to us is to bring together all of our differences, in culture, language, customs, wealth, and talents and realize they are gifts to be used in service for enrichment and development of us all. All, eventually, should have room in our hearts.

In so doing, we will be fulfilling the mission the Father entrusted to Jesus and then passed on to his Apostles and, now to us in the message spoken at the Last Supper:

“I pray not only for these, but for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us . . .”

John 17:20-21