

## Homily-Deacon Candidacy Mass-9/10/2016

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Good afternoon; I congratulate you as you transition from Aspirant to Candidate for ordination to the Permanent Diaconate. You have completed a significant portion of your journey, and now you will now enter into a time of study and discernment journey on a path that will hopefully prepare you for life of service to the people of God

In the gospel, we heard three parables reflecting God's mercy and the joy of God's Kingdom. Jesus speaks of the shepherd who searches earnestly for his lost sheep, leaving the 99 to find the one who has left his care and protection. Jesus describes the woman who lost the single coin and won't stop searching until she finds it with great joy. Then he completes our lesson of forgiveness and reconciliation with the story of the father and the prodigal son. In each of these parables he is telling us that the Father takes the initiative to find and restore fully those who are lost. In each parable it is the Father who tirelessly searches for them until he finds them, celebrating their reconciliation.

The lost sheep doesn't ask forgiveness, the coin doesn't repent, and the Father of the prodigal ran to embrace his child who was lost and kissed him before the son could even speak. This is the compassionate God we are privileged to proclaim every day in our vocations of mercy. This is the Good News that awaits discovery by every saint and sinner.

God certainly celebrates the righteous, but he understands the sadness of those who are lost. He understands the emptiness of those who have left behind or never knew the comfort of the Father's love, his mercy, and his peace. God understands and he pursues the lost with arms outstretched, waiting only for their return so he can call together all in his kingdom to say, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.

We are called, as deacons, priests, and bishops to help the lost to first know that they are indeed lost. It is our mission to help them to know that their hunger and thirst will be satisfied when they seek reconciliation with the Lord, and accept their invitation to the banquet of forgiveness and mercy. This is the "Good News" that Jesus told us to proclaim.

In our outreach to the lost, we are not to judge like the Pharisees, but instead, allow them to encounter Christ with hope and dignity, and introduce them to the loving God who awaits them with an embrace of welcome, and a kiss of forgiveness.

My brothers in Christ, we are indeed blessed that you have responded to the Father's calling. He calls us, not because we are worthy, but because God sees the potential for goodness in our hearts. Let us pray as the Psalmist, asking for God's great gifts; "A clean heart create for

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me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.” I ask you to continue your journey with humility, giving thanks for God’s abundant love and hope.

As you seek out the lost, I pray that you will embrace your calling with a servant’s heart, ministering with joy, not judgment. Pope Francis, speaking to deacons and their families once called them to serve with humility and kindness; “For God, who is love, out of love is ever ready to serve us. He is patient, kind and always there for us; he suffers for our mistakes and seeks the way to help us improve. These are the characteristics of Christian service; meek and humble, it imitates God by serving others: by welcoming them with patient love and unflagging sympathy, by making them feel welcome and at home.”

I remain united with you in prayer and I welcome you as you continue your servant’s journey as candidates to the diaconate. I will pray that your hearts will open ever wider to God’s love, becoming instruments of His mercy.