

Homily – Installation of Lectors and Acolytes

Permanent Diaconate Candidates

October 29, 2016

My brothers and sisters, we are the pilgrim people of God, traveling on a journey of faith, called by the Father, accompanied by the Son of God, led by the Holy Spirit. While all of us are on this journey, those of you in the permanent diaconate program are at a specific point in your pilgrimage today – as you are installed as lectors or acolytes. You may well have been a reader in your parish for many years, and you may have served at the altar since you were children. But today marks a special moment in your lives as you receive the offices of reader and acolyte and continue your journey toward ordination as permanent deacons.

Those who are receiving the Office of Reader today are taking on a special, sacred responsibility for God's people. The 2005 Synod of Bishops discussed the "sacramentality of the word." This aspect is understood by analogy with the real presence of Christ under the appearance of the consecrated bread and wine. The proclamation of God's word in the liturgical celebration acknowledges that Christ himself is present, he speaks to us, and he wishes to be heard!

This means that you must prepare carefully to read the word of God in the liturgical assembly. Ezra the scribe “read clearly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.” You are not reading a dictionary or a phone book – a fairy tale or a mystery story – no, you are reading the very word of God! Not simply an historical document. The living word of God spoken here and now. This means more than glancing to see if there are any “big” words or difficult names to pronounce. I urge you to practice aloud, listening to the sound of the words. What is the message being conveyed? What is the point of the passage? Pray over the passage; meditate on it. Then proclaim it with confidence. God needs you to proclaim his word! Focus your attention on the word of God and the congregation, not on yourself, and you will proclaim Scripture effectively.

Regarding the Office of Acolyte: like any other ritual, the liturgy has its rules, its rubrics. They tell us whether to sit or stand or kneel, to hold a lighted candle or to blow it out. It is important to know the rubrics that apply to you and carry them out with dignity and care, not by drawing attention to yourself but by assisting in the prayer that draws the congregation into deeper communion with God.

Recall the early Christian community who gathered to listen to the word of God, to partake of the Eucharist and to pray together.

This means that you need to be fully present to God and the community; get rid of distractions. Prepare your mind and heart and your whole being for the celebration. It is up to the ministers to set the example – that what we are about to do is awesome. We are called to enter more fully into God’s presence, proclaim our faith, listen to God’s word, celebrate a sacrament – praise God, ask for God’s forgiveness, thank God! As you prepare the sanctuary for worship before Mass or any other liturgy begins, do it with reverence, not rushing around and distracting everyone.

However, this also implies that, as ministers of the word and the altar, our lives must be holy. We need to walk in God’s ways throughout the week. We need to enter into the deep mystery of God’s presence and action in our own lives. Jesus is our model: He proclaims the teaching of his heavenly Father faithfully, boldly, confident in the one who sent him into the world.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe help us so that we may proclaim God’s word and serve his people with fidelity and great love.