

Permanent Deacon Ordination Homily

Pope Francis in the ordination of deacons a few years ago said: “... if evangelizing is the mission entrusted at baptism to each Christian, *servicing* is the way that mission is carried out. It is the only way to be a disciple of Jesus. His witnesses are those who do as he did: those who serve their brothers and sisters, never tiring of following Christ in his humility, never becoming weary of the Christian life, which is a life of service.”

Jesus in the gospel today reflects on his upcoming death as he helps his disciples understand what a life of carrying the cross is all about. He knows he will give life by dying and that “this world’s prince,” the evil one, will be driven out. The giving or sacrificing of our lives is what the gospel calls us to. Something needs to die in all of us in order to produce more life, and to drive out the evil that continues to rear its ugly head. Otherwise, the evil one will continue to sow hate, division and prejudice among us. We have seen so many examples of that here in our country this past year.

The “hour” is what John has spoken about throughout his gospel. Jesus giving his life on the cross reveals the love that is God.

The story before today’s gospel begins with a simple yet powerful request: some Greeks ask Phillip, “We would like to see Jesus.” What a beautiful aspirational wish! It is in the heart of all believers in Jesus.

We just want to see him. We just want to hear his voice in our heart. We want to feel his compassion and gentle touch healing us of so much that afflicts us. We just want to know he walks with us in difficult times of strife and stress. In a year like this past one when so much has gone wrong, when so much tension, division, suffering, hate, prejudice, lies, and death have been a big part of life, we just want Jesus! Is that too much to ask?

He connects their request to see him with another way of seeing him, namely understanding that to see him is to accept the total giving of our lives for the other. To see Jesus is to see him in the suffering, sacrifices, struggle, anxiety, challenge and even despair of others and to see him in my response, in my sacrifices and committed service.

“Unless the grain of wheat dies it does not bear fruit.” This entire past year has been trying to see Jesus in so much that has happened with this virus, in the terrified face of the sick, in the loneliness of the elderly in nursing homes with no visitors, in the despair of the medical staff holding the hand of a stranger at the last breath of their life, in those fighting the prejudice and discrimination of racism and the divisions that threaten to tear our society apart. We see Jesus in the volunteers at the food bank and those with the unaccompanied migrant children. Look for him! He is everywhere! “We want to see Jesus.”

There has been a lot of dying as well. We have seen death up close. Any of us could have been fatalities. The virus spared no age

group, no ethnic group, no area of the country. Have we allowed ourselves to be touched by others' pain? How can we be indifferent now after this experience? If anything, we have learned how much we are bound together. Your diaconate will call you to accompany and walk with others in their pains. Jesus will be there.

The dying and rising are continuous. The struggle against the evil in us and in the world is never ending. Your life has been about "we want to see Jesus." Your call to the diaconate has been part of this desire. Your formation preparation has helped you see Jesus in new and powerful ways. With him we can truly be at our best.

Pope Francis added in his words to deacons, "As a deacon you will serve at the table of the Eucharist. There you will find the presence of Jesus, who gives himself to you so that you can give yourselves to others. In this way, available in life, meek of heart and in constant dialogue with Jesus, you will not be afraid to be *servants of Christ*, and to encounter and caress the flesh of the Lord in the poor of our time."

My brothers, do not be afraid. Keep in your heart always the desire to look for and see Jesus in your own dying to self so that your fruit of service can always spring forth.

May the Virgin Mary help us to be open to the Holy Spirit, so that we may be able to serve one another and strengthen each other ever more deeply in faith and love, keeping our hearts open to the needs of our brothers and sister.

