

Dear friends,

I call you friends, gentlemen, because you are about to enter into the Sacred Mystery of the Sacrament of Holy Orders through ordination as deacons in service of the Church. As the first reading today indicates clearly, from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, entry into this Sacred Order for Ministry is not something which is a mere human choice! No, you are responding to God who has called you, chosen you, and prepared you through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jeremiah felt unworthy and too young for this awesome responsibility, so you, too, may be feeling this way. If you feel unworthy, or unprepared for this moment, welcome to the club! You are in good company with the humble communion of patriarchs, prophets, and saints throughout the ages! In fact, if you do feel worthy of this calling, it may not be for you, for you will be lacking in the humility necessary to serve well. Your founder, St. Alfonsus Ligouri, counted humility among the chief virtues needed for Redemptorists and those engaged in the ministries of the Church.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has recently referred to deacons as “Servants of Charity.” Indeed, throughout the history of the Church deacons have served as the first ministers of charity within the community, as well as from the community of the Church to the larger world. To this very day, deacons are to be marked by their commitment to the works of charity and justice, and the corporal works of mercy for others. It is light of this reality that we read today’s gospel from St. John in which Jesus admonishes his disciples, his followers, to love one another as he has loved them.

And how has he loved them? To the very giving of his life on the cross for their salvation. Therefore, the form of charity we are to serve is not merely the doing of kindnesses for others – important as that is – but more, the willingness to sacrifice our very selves for the life and salvation of others. This is very serious. And, this is why the rituals we celebrate in today’s Sacred Liturgy are so solemn and important.

In the New Testament, in addition to their duties in ministering to the needs of others, deacons very quickly also became servants of the Word through proclaiming the gospel to others and by catechizing them. We have seen this with St. Steven and notably, with St. Philip. Therefore, the Church also entrusts the proclamation of the gospel to you through this ordination and asks you to teach the meaning of the Word of God through preaching homilies and teaching the catechesis of the Church. In this way you will assist the bishops and priests in the ministry of the Word, and you share in the office of Christ as a prophet. In our time the need for clear and persuasive catechesis is so very necessary, and I admonish you to focus much of your attention to this prophetic role.

Finally, deacons are also the custodians of the Holy Eucharist. You become one the Church’s ordinary ministers of holy communion for those assembled in worship, as well as those who are homebound or otherwise not able to be with the community of the Church. You will bless the people through Eucharistic benediction and preserve the dignity of the Holy Eucharist through proper reservation in the tabernacle. The Holy Eucharist is literally Jesus,

present to us body and blood, soul and divinity. Therefore, minister the Holy Eucharist with dignity, love, and respect. The Christ you present to others in the Word and in the Sacrament is the same Christ to whom you minister in the faces of the poor, the rejected, the outcast, the sick, the ignorant, and the marginalized.

Thus, to be a deacon is indeed to be a Servant of Charity, a living representation of the divine love God pours out upon His people through you! Do not fear if you are worthy. Rather, focus on the fact that you have been called and chosen in your own human reality to humbly serve Christ in others. Let this be your consolation and your prize! Amen.