

**Talk – Our Vocation to Service after the Example of St. Lawrence –  
Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Program – August 10, 2024**

Dear friends in Christ, I am delighted to meet with you today, and to see in you some future features of the face of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Thank you for responding “Yes” to God, who calls you to serve his people. Let us take a few minutes today to reflect precisely on our baptismal vocation to serve the People of God. As the Church celebrates the liturgical Feast of Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr, let us draw some inspiration from the life and witness of Saint Lawrence. As one of the seven deacons of Rome, Lawrence’s martyrdom and legendary acts of charity continue to illuminate the path of Christian service.

Saint Lawrence lived during a time of great persecution for Christians. He served as a deacon under Pope Sixtus II and was martyred on August 10, 258, four days after Pope Sixtus himself. The facts of his life, sparse though they may be, are enriched by traditions that have grown around his legacy. Lawrence’ tomb is located at the basilica of St. Lawrence-outside-the-Walls, in Rome, which stands as a testament to his enduring influence.

One of the most famous stories about Saint Lawrence involves his handling of the Church’s treasures. When the Roman prefect demanded that Lawrence surrender these treasures, he requested a short time to gather them. Lawrence then distributed the Church’s wealth to the poor, the sick, and the needy. When the prefect arrived to collect the treasure, Lawrence presented him with these very people, declaring, “Here is the treasure of the Church.”

This act is a profound expression of the Church's true wealth – its people, especially those who are most vulnerable. In this, Lawrence exemplifies our baptismal call to serve others, particularly the marginalized. His actions remind us that the Church's mission is not about accumulating material wealth but about serving Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters. As Saint Ambrose of Milan eloquently put it, these poor and suffering individuals are the vessels in whom Christ Himself dwells. This perspective challenges us to recognize the inherent dignity and value of every person, especially those often overlooked by society.

Lawrence's martyrdom further emphasizes the depth of his commitment to this call. According to tradition, he was tortured and eventually martyred by being roasted alive. Even in his final moments, Lawrence's courage and faith shone brightly. As he lay on the gridiron, he is said to have joked saying, "This side is broiled enough; please turn me over and then eat." This remarkable composure in the face of brutal persecution reflects a profound inner strength and an unshakable faith in the promises of Christ. This is only possible thanks to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Ambrose captures this aspect of Lawrence's character in his writings. He describes how Lawrence, seeing Pope Sixtus being led to martyrdom, expressed a deep desire to follow him, not out of fear of suffering but out of a desire to share in the witness of faith. Ambrose quotes Lawrence's poignant plea: "Where, father, are you going without your son?" This exchange reveals Lawrence's deep understanding of the Christian call to witness, even unto death. He saw his role not just as a deacon but

as a co-sufferer with Christ, eager to bear witness to the faith through the ultimate sacrifice.

Pope Francis has said: *“In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel (vv. 31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed. If we seek the holiness pleasing to God’s eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’ (vv. 35-36). Holiness, then, is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: ‘If we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified’. The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is ‘not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ’. In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate.”*

For you, as lay ecclesial ministers, the example of Saint Lawrence offers a powerful model of the baptismal vocation to service. Our calling is to be servants of the Church, to care for the people of God, and to uphold the dignity of all, especially the poor and the marginalized. In every act of service, we are called to see Christ in others and to be Christ for others. This is the essence of the diaconal service that Lawrence embodied – a service characterized by humility, generosity, and a deep love for God and neighbor.

**Moreover, Lawrence's story challenges us to confront the often uncomfortable realities of our faith journey. We are reminded that true service may demand great sacrifice and that our commitment to the Gospel may sometimes lead us into conflict with worldly powers and values. In such moments, we are called to stand firm in our faith, as Lawrence did, trusting in God's providence and the promise of eternal life.**

**Let us renew our commitment to our baptismal vocation to serve. Let us embrace the treasures of the Church – God's people – and serve them with love, compassion, and humility. May the courage and faith of Saint Lawrence inspire you to be faithful witnesses to Christ in all you do, ever ready to give your lives in service to the Gospel.**

**May the example of Saint Lawrence, together with his intercession and the comforting protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe, strengthen us in our journey and guide us as we seek to build a Church that truly reflects the love and mercy of Christ.**