



Archdiocese of San Antonio

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Homily – Permanent Diaconate Ordination

May 28, 2016

This is a very special celebration not only for those who are to be ordained deacons and their wives, but for the entire Archdiocese of San Antonio. This is the largest class we have had so far, and I am delighted and grateful for the many, many gifts these candidates bring to the Church's mission and ministry. All of us also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to their wives for sharing their husbands with us and accompanying them in this rigorous formation program.

What is the diaconate? The word comes from the Greek verb meaning to *serve* or from the noun meaning *service*. But what kind of service? The Second Vatican Council and recent Popes have stressed a threefold ministry: of the Word, of the altar, and of charity.

The service of the Word entails proclaiming the gospel at Mass and articulating the Church's needs in the general intercessions. It also includes preaching, catechizing, counseling, instructing

catechumens, giving retreats, conducting parish renewal programs, reaching out to alienated Catholics – the work of evangelization.

The **service of the altar** entails helping at the Mass and other sacraments by preparing the gifts and distributing communion at Mass, baptizing children and adults, witnessing marriages in the name of the Church, bringing Viaticum to the dying, presiding over wakes, funerals, and burial services – as well as presiding at the Liturgy of the Hours, exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The **service of charity** is as extensive as there are human needs – ministering in hospitals and prisons, visiting the homebound and people in nursing homes, ministering to people in detention centers and their families – addressing the root causes of problems by working for social justice, and many other modes of service.

Saint John Paul II pointed out that these three services are interconnected: “The word of God inevitably leads to the Eucharistic worship of God at the altar; in turn, this worship leads to a new way of living which expresses itself in charity. . . By the same token, acts of charity which are **not** rooted in the word of God and in worship **cannot** bear lasting fruit.” Your diaconal ministry must include all

three dimensions according to the needs of the communities you serve.

Yes, this is a day of great joy – but it comes with a serious cost. Listen attentively to Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper on the night before his death: "Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." You have become close friends with one another during the diaconate program. Now your embrace must reach out to include everyone you encounter.

This means serving others, especially the most vulnerable among us, even when we may prefer, instead, to serve ourselves or only our friends and loved ones. It means being willing to let go of an image of self-importance in order to enter into the full paschal mystery. It means loving others as Jesus does – fully, faithfully, holding nothing back – not performing in order to be seen and esteemed by others.

My brothers, you are undergoing a transformation in the celebration of this Sacrament of Holy Orders. Strive to live in such a way that you will produce much good fruit. We will call down upon you the Holy Spirit to empower you to do this and give you his

sevenfold gifts. May Our Lady, the Mother of the Church, be at your side and help you in this vital ministry of the Church.