

**Homily for the Ordination of Brother Fernando Solomon, OP Miss. &  
Brother Adam Zawadzki, OP. Miss  
to the Sacred Order of Deacons**

**Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Church  
Alton, IL**

**February 6, 2016**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here this afternoon to celebrate this important and historic day in the life of the Dominican Missionaries for the Deaf as we prepare for the first diaconate ordination of two brothers from this community.

When the Church uses the word “ordination,” she is speaking of the “sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons.”<sup>1</sup> This sacramental act is the conferral of the sacrament known as Holy Orders. This sacrament is unique in that it can be conferred on three separate occasions, each time with a different degree of participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Bishops and priests participate directly in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ, while

deacons are ordained to help and serve the bishop and his priests, thus the term “deacon” which comes from the Greek word for service, *diakonia*.<sup>2</sup>

There can be a temptation when looking at an ordination to see it primarily through the lens of function. In other words, it can be easy to look at your ordination by what it is that you will be able to do once you are ordained. Not that this is unimportant, because the active service that you will provide as deacons is crucial to what it means to be a deacon. In fact, it was because some of the practical needs of the faithful were not being met by the Apostles in the early Church that the diaconate was created.<sup>3</sup>

What you do, however, can never be separated from being aware of the significance of who you become through your ordination as deacons. In a very real way, you will become changed men through your reception of this sacrament. Although you may not look or feel any different, something profound will take place at the very core of your being in your soul. The sacrament will mark you “with an imprint [or] (‘character’) which cannot be removed and which configures [you] to Christ, who made himself the ‘deacon’ or servant of all.”<sup>4</sup>

This configuration to Christ is at the very heart of your identity as a deacon and it should be the foundation which underlies all of the activities that you will do as a deacon. In an address given by Pope St. John Paul II, he highlighted this point when he said that:

Carrying out ministerial and apostolic activities, fulfilling possible family and social responsibilities and, lastly, practicing an intense personal life of prayer require of the deacon, whether celibate or married, that unity of life which can only be attained, as Vatican Council II taught, through deep union with Christ (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14).<sup>5</sup>

The reception of any sacrament involves the conferral of grace, which can be simply understood as “a participation in the life of God.”<sup>6</sup> Each sacrament confers a particular grace that is unique to that sacrament, and so your reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders as a deacon is your participation in the life of Christ, particularly in His role of service to the people. It is this grace that then enables you to perform the actions associated with the diaconate, not on your own, but through your participation in the very life of Christ. And since it is His life working through you in this unique way, we have great confidence that His work

will be more effective and fruitful than similar actions performed by those outside the sacrament of Holy Orders.

This should be very consoling to you, for the task of serving the people of God can seem daunting and overwhelming at times. We may find ourselves making excuses for why we are not qualified or equipped to do such important work on behalf of the Church. Such was the response of the Prophet Jeremiah, about whom we heard in the first reading. After telling the Lord that he was not capable and too young for the task at hand, the Lord responded by telling him: "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you... See, I place my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:8-9). It is the Lord who is ultimately responsible for the work. He knows our weaknesses, and yet He chooses us anyway. He comes to dwell within us in an even deeper way through the sacrament so that His life will work through even our weaknesses to manifest His glory.

It is therefore important for you to constantly be aware of this gift of grace that you receive in ordination and to strive to deepen your union with Christ daily. The more you allow yourself to do this, the more fruitful will be your ministry, for you will be ever more docile instruments in the hands of the Lord who works in you and through you.

The Gospel passage that we just heard confirms this point. Jesus tells His disciples: “remain in my love” (John 15:9). He gives this instruction as the prelude to the command to “love one another” (John 15:12), a command that is at the root of the call to all forms of Christian service, particularly your ministerial service as deacons in the Church. Never fail to observe this sequence of commands. If you jump right into the works of service without first being renewed and strengthened in the gift of God’s love, you will risk burning out, for as the philosophical maxim remind us: “you cannot give what you do not have.”

In just a few moments, you will make a series of promises that correspond to what the Church is asking of you as she confers this great gift upon you through the laying on of my hands. The final promise that you will make is a summary of what is expected of you as a deacon, when you resolve to conform your entire way of life to the example of Christ. Everything that you do should reflect the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. You are to order your life in such a way that you can say as St. Paul did in his letter to the Galatians: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Your response indicates that you humbly recognize that such an imitation is only possible with God’s help and that it is not

something you can do by your own power. But with the grace that the Lord will bestow upon you in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, you will be capable of fulfilling this demanding, yet beautiful life of ordained ministry.

It is my prayer for the two of you that you embrace this new way of life by living that well-ordered life that is expected of you by Christ and His Church. Whether you are administering baptism solemnly, being a custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, assisting at and blessing marriages in the name of the Church, bringing Viaticum to the dying, reading the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, instructing and exhorting the people, presiding over the worship and prayer of the faithful, administering sacramentals, or officiating at funeral and burial services<sup>7</sup>, always do them being conscious of who you are, men sacramentally configured to Christ who works through you for the sanctification and salvation of the People of God.

I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to pray for these men, and indeed for all of the Church's ordained ministers, that we might be open to the grace of our ordination, so that we can be of greater assistance to you in your earthly pilgrimage of faith as we all strive to hear those welcome

words at the end of that journey: “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy our your Lord” (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> CCC 1538.

<sup>2</sup> CCC §1554.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>4</sup> CCC §1570.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Address to Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy*, 30 November 1995.

<sup>6</sup> CCC §1997.

<sup>7</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, §29.