

**Homily for the Ordination of Adam Cox, O.F.S., Michael Halbrook,
Dennis Holbrook, Bruce Scott, Robert Sgambelluri, and Joseph John Zagorski
to the Diaconate
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

June 26th, 2021

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

My dear brother priests dedicated permanent deacons, beloved consecrated men and women religious, and my devoted lay brothers and sisters in Christ . . . it is *good* to be here, with you, and with Our Lord, on this blessed day.

I speak today especially to my brothers in the diaconate from around our diocese, and to the six men who will be added to their ranks in a few moments: Adam Cox, Michael Halbrook, Dennis Holbrook, Bruce Scott, Robert Sgambelluri, and Joseph John Zagorski.

As Our Lord did through His apostles in the first days of the Church, He again today reaches out to these chosen men to give them a participation in His own diaconal character, a call and vocation to *service*, after the model of Jesus Himself. A preliminary point has to be made: Christian service is far more than mouthing pious platitudes or performing some variety of good deeds cloaked in a vague notion of spiritual motivation. Nor is it equivalent

to the “good service” rendered by a restaurant in providing you a meal, or the service of stopping to help a friend change a flat tire. These are all good and praiseworthy actions, but they are not the extent of Christ-like service that is asked of us as Christians, much less do they comprise the charitable character of the deacon.

Our Lord calls all of us to *His* kind of service, a heavenly kind of love, a charity that is cruciform, and Christ-like, in character. Today He is drawing these men, as deacons, into one particular mode of participation in this. Diaconal-service, in the first place, is marked by the handing-on of God’s word. *“Then the Lord extended his hand and touched my mouth, saying to me, See, I place my words in your mouth!”* (Jeremiah 1:9).

As deacons you will soon be entrusted with the book of the Gospels, a gift you will receive again, and give again, at every Mass where you proclaim Christ’s Good News and preach His mercy and majesty. You are called to unleash the Gospel upon all of our hearts, not least your own, and let the power of Christ’s words and actions convict and convert and transform the lives of His flock to better know and love Him. This is no simple task, but neither does it depend on your own talents and qualifications. Christ asks you not to concoct your own sermon, to fashion a

message of your own making, but to speak with His voice, and thus to serve with His Words.

Secondly, diaconal service is marked by assisting the priest at the Sacrifice of the Mass, specifically in being made ordinary ministers of Holy Communion. *“Brothers”* the Apostles announced, *“select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task”* (Acts 6:3). Today our diocese rejoices that you have been chosen for this task!

Just a few days ago when Pope Francis met with the permanent deacons of Rome, he reminded them that they are neither priests, nor glorified altar boys.¹ You do not confect the Eucharist, but you also do not need special permission to carry it. Today you become consecrated vessels, fit to carry the Blessed Sacrament, vested in gold and white on the outside, a change that must signify an interior disposition of perseverance in reverence and holiness on the inside. This, as before, vastly supersedes the service offered by the best wait-staff at the fanciest restaurant! As you adore, and carry, the Bread of Angels, your faithfulness and prayerfulness during the Mass will be one of the key ways that you serve God’s people in drawing them close to this gift that He gives all of us.

All of these facets of diaconal service find their model and source in Christ, but our third aspect of diaconal service goes directly to His heart, for it is a service not merely of His *Word*, or His *Flesh*, but directly of His *Love*. “*As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love*” (John 15:9-10). Love, of course, means willing another’s good, and self-sacrifice, and a pre-eminent love for the abandoned and poor, and, yes, sometimes even changing flat tires!

Jesus starts this tremendous invitation with an injunction to *keep His commandments*, and we must start there too. As much as we would all like love to be easy and comfortable and periodic and predictable, Jesus will not let us succumb to such a cheap facsimile of real, divine, love. “*My commandment is this: love one another as I have loved you.*”

How did Jesus Love? Yes, He loved us to accept the cross, but even more fundamentally, *as the Father willed it*. From now on, every action you take will be the action of a deacon of Jesus Christ, a servant conformed to His kind of servitude, *but* above all else your first priority must always be to *do His Will*. Sometimes that will be a simple tedious task; often it will mean going out of your way to assist a friend, or enemy; and *always* it will mean

going past the point of your own comfort and capacity, and relying on His grace to get you through.

We cannot love as Christ loves, or as the Father asks us to, on our own, that is why we are given all the sacraments and their accompanying graces, and it is why today you are given the Sacrament of Holy Orders in the sacred order of the diaconate.

Anybody can speak nice words, cater a good meal, or fix the occasional flat tire . . . but *only* the deacon is united to Christ specifically in serving His Church by being made a minister of *God's Word*, a receptacle for His *Body and Blood*, and an instrument of *His Love*. My brothers, receive this gift and your call today with joy, and live it well. And may all of us receive from these men with open hearts those gifts that Christ, Our Lord, gives us through them: His Word, His Flesh, and His Love.

*Make us true servants of all those in need,
Filled with compassion of thought, word, and deed.
Loving our neighbor, whatever the cost,
Feeding the hungry and finding the lost.*

*Lord, make us prophets to cry out the way,
Telling the nations of mercy's new day.
Let us break barriers of hatred and scorn,
Speaking of hope to all people forlorn.*

*Lord, make us healers of body and mind,
Give us Your power to bring sight to the blind;
Love to the loveless and gladness for pain,
Filling all hearts with the joy of your name.²*

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PERMANENT DEACONS OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME, WITH THEIR FAMILIES. Hall of Benediction. Saturday, 19 June 2021.
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/june/documents/20210619-diaconi.html>

² "Make us True Servants," text by Susan G. Wentz; tune: Slane (Irish folk song). World Library Publications, 1978.