

**Homily for 11th Sunday Ordinary Time
Diocesan Day for the Diaconate.**

One of the most valuable achievements of the Second Vatican Council (Balthasar Fischer) is to give the ministry of diaconate a central place in the church of today and tomorrow. The deacon is the sacramental representative of the archdeacon Jesus Christ in the Church, for mankind and especially for the poor. The sacramental sign of the diaconate is that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Washing the feet of others is an expression of love, unlike washing the head of another. The permanent deacon - like the priest and the bishop - remains throughout their life deacon, servant, to give visibility to the deacon Jesus Christ. The deacon is neither a consecrated social worker nor a substitute for the priest, he is the sacramental symbol of the archdeacon Jesus Christ for the Church in the service of mankind.

The Church needs the diaconate also in the sense that all clerical service is *diakonia*. *Diakonia* means service - with Jesus Christ for mankind. The deacon must serve the Word of God and must serve by the word of God. According to Church tradition, the main responsibility of the deacon is the proclamation of the Gospel at all levels and in all forms. The deacon is an evangelist! He must give the bread of the Word to mankind, the Word that gives meaning to mankind and his life, for man does not live by bread alone but also by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The first task of the deacon is evangelisation; he proclaims what he has heard. He can share the gospel only if he himself gives priority to listening to the Word of God. This is why the ministry of the diaconate is not simply a job, nor a profession, but a vocation. God calls man to the depths of his humanity, where we experience as human beings the joy and suffering of mankind. "The joy and hope, sorrow and anguish of mankind today, especially of the poor and oppressed of all kinds, are also the joy and hope, sorrow and anguish of Jesus' disciples. (Gaudium et Spes 1). The deacon is a man, who deep within himself, is challenged by the Gospel. The cross is also at the centre of the Gospel. Whoever accepts the cross in his own life can also understand the cross and the pain of others and can truly offer comfort to others. Thus he partakes in the salvation and restores in mankind what God intended.

The deacon is at the service of his neighbour. The love of our neighbour should not be a hollow expression. The life of the deacon must respond to the life of Jesus. The diaconate has a basic function in proclaiming the gospel and in liturgical celebrations. These three together form the perfect harmony of ecclesiastical life, a model for all of us.

We often speak today quite rightly about the lack of priests. But should we not also deplore the lack of deacons in today's church? The diaconate is not only an essential dimension of the life of the Church, but it is also inseparably linked to other fundamental functions of the Church. In the example of diaconate we see whether a celebration is right and serious: a liturgical practice, which in everyday life is not

interpreted and reflected in the diaconal service of the washing of the feet, is exposed to the risk of becoming hollow and empty. Then the liturgical celebration is only a cult, a facade. This is why the deacon, at the end of the Eucharist, calls the faithful to witness: "Go in Peace! "Ite missa est," which means that this is the moment when the peace of Christ gets a chance in the world in the face of discord.

At his ordination the deacon promises to pray faithfully and constantly for the people of God and for the whole world. The deacon is credible if he is a man of prayer. In prayer we meet God who is present in all of us. This conviction of faith can only go beyond the theory stage if we convince ourselves of its presence in prayer and deepen our attachment to Him. Prayer does not distract from concrete service. The deacon, a man of prayer, who promises respect and obedience to the bishop, in the sense that the true service in the Church does not consist of self-realisation, but the realisation of the love of God for mankind.

Diaconate Day is an opportunity to be thankful for the many men who, with their wives and families, have not shut out the call of God. Let us keep in our thoughts all permanent deacons, whether married or single, in a professional or secondary capacity.

The parable of the good seed is also good news for all deacons whose hearts beat for the diaconate. The diaconate in the Church often appears to be in vain. Like the sower in the parable the deacons and all of us are called to build on the grace of God who always comes to meet us through His love. God does not need stars, nor perfect Christians. God lets you grow. And sometimes it is enough not to oppose that. Let's take a look at the history of the Church: we discover then that not only great theologians have advanced the Church but also people like Francis of Assisi and many others. Through the example of such men we recognise the work of God. Yes, God is at work in the diaconate. Let's discover these encouraging and follow them. Let's give thanks.