

**“I have come not to be served but to serve.”**

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

October 31, 2020

Ordination of Permanent Deacons

St. Mary’s Cathedral, Fargo

Dear friends, this is a joyful day, and I’m happy to welcome all of you here to St. Mary’s Cathedral. This ordination day is the culmination of five years of prayer and formation, and at last our brothers come to the moment they have prepared for. They, your husbands, fathers, relatives and friends are to be advanced to the Order of Deacons.

The times we live in present unique challenges, and the needs are certainly great. With the ongoing experience of the coronavirus pandemic and all of the limitations that it imposes on us, we are doing our best to carry on the mission that Christ entrusted to his Church. We look for new ways to reach out and serve the people of God, especially those who are sick, those who are afraid and alone.

Who can forget that dramatic scene last spring when Pope Francis stood alone in a darkened, empty St. Peter’s Square. He addressed the world and pointed out that all our earthly certainties have been challenged; many of them have been swept away. But Christ is with us to strengthen and sustain us. Just as he remained with the apostles in the storm at sea and brought them to safe harbor, so he remains with us in the storms we face. He will never abandon us, and that, my brothers, is the message that we must repeat again and again to God’s people. He is with us, he loves us, and he will never abandon us. You are now entrusted with proclaiming and preaching the Gospel. In your mission of preaching, offer to the faithful the challenging but consoling message of Jesus, the Gospel in all its fullness. By your preaching and in the power of the Spirit, lead them always to Jesus himself.

As deacons, your state in life is in the world. That will bring challenges, but it also gives you advantages as you seek to share the faith with others. You will have a unique capacity to reach those who perhaps would be out of reach for others, even your pastor or your bishop. You will be able to approach others with your own gift of faith and the Gospel witness of your lives. Never forget that evangelization is at the heart of the Church’s life, and therefore must be at the heart of your lives as deacons. You will have the privilege of leading the faithful in prayer, welcoming souls into the divine life through the waters of baptism, assisting and blessing couples as they join their lives together in marriage. You will bring the Eucharist to the sick and the dying, and even celebrate the Church’s funeral liturgy for those who have passed from this life to the next.

And in a particular way, you will be united to the Lord’s sacrifice at the altar. Consecrated by the laying on of hands, you will assist the bishop and the priest as they celebrate the Eucharist, and you will bring our Eucharistic Lord to the faithful. Unite yourself to him as you accept his call to service, to *diakonia*, and always remember the words he spoke to his followers: “I have come not to be served but to serve.” Just as Christ gave himself to us for our salvation, now he asks you in a similar spirit of charity, to give of yourself for the needs of his people and for the building up of his Kingdom.

My brothers, you also have been called as family men, as spouses and fathers. Your wives have accompanied you on this journey, and their participation in your ministry will continue. How blessed you are to have their companionship, their support, and their prayer to sustain you in your diaconal service. Dear wives of our candidates, you have been so faithful and generous as you walked this journey with your husbands. I pray that you will continue to grow with them as they enter more deeply into the life of the Church. Give them your wise counsel and your spousal love. Families, please pray for and support these men as they strive to serve our Lord in a new way, after his example as servants to all.

From the very beginning, the Church has been blessed with the example of many holy deacons. Stephen was among those first called for the ministry of charity, and was the first who shed his blood for

Christ. Lawrence too gave his life for our Lord, but first was known as a model of compassion and care for the poor. Francis showed the world what joy there is in following Christ, and by the example of his poor life, he brought renewal to the Church. And now you, my brothers, will offer your own gifts to our Lord. Allow him to always live within you, so that he might make of you an instrument of his grace and mercy.

Dear brothers, I will say to you what I said to the men I ordained as priests this summer. You have been called by our Lord to serve his Church in an interesting time. The challenges are many, the opportunities are endless, and the grace of God is unfailing. Be firmly rooted and grounded in faith, and be true to the calling you have received as ministers of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Then on the last day, when you go out to meet the Lord you will be able to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."