

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PERMANENT DEACONS OF ROME**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 18 February 2006*

Dear Roman Deacons,

I am particularly glad to meet you today on the 25th anniversary of the re-establishment of the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Rome. I greet with affection the Cardinal Vicar, whom I thank for his words on behalf of you all. I also greet Bishop Vincenzo Apicella, until now in charge of the Diocesan Centre for the Permanent Diaconate, and Mons. Francesco Peracchi, Delegate of the Cardinal Vicar who has supervised your formation for years. I offer my most cordial welcome to each one of you and to your families.

In a famous passage from his Letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul says that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (2: 7). He, Christ, is the example at which to look. In the Gospel, he told his disciples he had come "not to be served but to serve" (cf. Mt 20: 28). In particular, during the Last Supper, after having once again explained to the Apostles that he was among them "as one who serves" (Lk 22: 27), he made the humble gesture of washing the feet of the Twelve, a duty of slaves, setting an example so that his disciples might imitate him in service and in mutual love.

Union with Christ, to be cultivated through prayer, sacramental life and in particular, Eucharistic adoration, is of the greatest importance to your ministry, if it is truly to testify to God's love. Indeed, as I wrote in my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, "Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given" (n. 14).

Dear deacons, accept with joy and gratitude the love the Lord feels for you and pours out in your lives, and generously give to people what you have received as a free gift. The Church of Rome has a long tradition of service to the city's poor. In these years new forms of poverty have emerged.

Indeed, many people have lost the meaning of life and do not possess a truth upon which to build their existence; a great many young people ask to meet men and women who can listen to and advise them in life's difficulties. Beside material poverty, we also find spiritual and cultural poverty.

Our Diocese, aware that the encounter with Christ, "gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*ibid.*, n. 1) is devoting special attention to the topic of the transmission of the faith.

Dear deacons, I am grateful to you for the services you carry out with great generosity in many parish communities of Rome, dedicating yourselves in particular to the ministries

of Baptism and the family. By teaching Christ's Gospel, a faculty conferred upon you by the Bishop on the day of your ordination, you help parents who ask for Baptism for their children to reflect more deeply on the mystery of the divine life that has been given to us, and that of the Church, the great family of God.

Meanwhile, you also proclaim the truth about human love to engaged couples who desire to celebrate the sacrament of marriage, explaining that "marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa" (*ibid.*, n. 11).

Many of you work in offices, hospitals and schools: in these contexts you are called to be servants of the Truth. By proclaiming the Gospel, you will be able to convey the Word that can illumine and give meaning to human work, to the suffering of the sick, and you will help the new generations to discover the beauty of the Christian faith.

Thus you will be deacons of the liberating Truth, and you will lead the inhabitants of this city to encounter Jesus Christ.

Welcoming the Redeemer into their lives is a source of deep joy for human beings, a joy that can bring peace even in moments of trial. Therefore, be servants of the Truth in order to be messengers of the joy that God desires to give to every human being.

However, it is not enough to proclaim the faith with words alone for, as the Apostle James recalls, "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (Jas 2: 17). Thus, it is necessary to back up the proclamation of the Gospel with a practical witness of charity, so that "for the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity... but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 25).

The practice of charity has been part of the diaconal ministry from the outset: the "seven" of which the Acts of the Apostles speak were chosen "to serve at tables".

You, who belong to the Church of Rome, are the heirs of a long tradition, of which the Deacon Lawrence is a singularly fine and luminous example. Many of the poor who come knocking at the doors of parish communities to ask for the help they need to get through moments of serious difficulty often come from countries very far from Italy.

Welcome these brothers and sisters with great warmth and willingness, and do all you can to help them in their need, always remembering the Lord's words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).

I express my gratitude to those of you who are employed in this silent and daily witness of charity. Indeed, through your service, the poor realize that they too belong to that great family of God's children: the Church.

Dear Roman deacons, by living and witnessing to God's infinite love, may you always be, in your ministry, at the service of building the Church as communion. In your work you

are sustained by the affection and prayer of your families. Your vocation is a special grace for your family life, which in this way is called to be ever more open to the will of the Lord and to the needs of the Church. May the Lord reward the availability with which your wives and children accompany you in your service to the entire ecclesial community.

May Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord who gave the Saviour to the world, and the Deacon Lawrence who loved the Lord to the point of giving up his life for him, always accompany you with their intercession. With these sentiments, I wholeheartedly impart to each one of you the Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to all your loved ones and to everyone you meet in your ministry.

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