

Holy Thursday 2023 – The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Welcome to this very special and very solemn liturgy. One of the themes of Maundy Thursday - is the sacrament of Holy Orders and it is about this that I will speak tonight.

First of all, the sacrament is called “Holy Orders,” not “Holy Order.” Holy Orders refers to the three apostolic ministries: the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders was instituted by our Lord himself who conferred His Spirit upon his disciples and empowered them to confer His Spirit upon others. The fact is that the Church is not just One, Holy and Catholic, it is Apostolic. Deacons, priests and bishops are ordained to continue the work of the work of Jesus that He entrusted to the apostles.

The sacrament of Holy Orders confers on every deacon, priest and bishop an indelible spiritual character which cannot be repeated, neither can it be conferred temporarily. The vocation and mission received on the day of his ordination marks him permanently.

The sacrament is bestowed on those chosen and qualified to mediate the presence of the Lord to his people through Word and Sacrament. Deacons, are called to serve the Lord by caring for His people particularly in evangelisation and charitable outreach. Deacons may preach, witness marriages, distribute Holy Communion, baptise and conduct funerals.

Deacons who are ordained to the second level of Holy Orders, the priesthood, still remain deacons. Thus every priest is also a

deacon. In the same way, priests who become bishops, remain deacons and priests. Sometimes a bishop may symbolise the fullness of orders bestowed upon him by wearing a deacon vestment, the dalmatic, under a priest vestment, the chasuble, as well as the mitre, the symbol of the bishop. Full pontificals, as such vesture is called, is worn to remind the bishop and the church who he really is – a servant of the church in whom the fullness of apostolic ministry is to be found.

Receiving the character, gifts and responsibilities of Holy Orders places one in a certain position in the community of the church, not a better or more privileged place, but a place from which one is called to spend one's life in humble service of the people of God.

Therefore, Holy Orders effects a change in the person so ordained for the sake of the entire Church. A priest does not stop being a priest when he leaves the office or the altar. When a priest takes a day off or goes on holiday, he takes leave from administration and other forms of ministry, but not from the priesthood. The priest, as well as the deacon and bishop, can validly say, "Priesthood, Diaconate, Episcopacy is not what I do. It is who I am."

At the same time, I am "who I am," not for myself, but for the People of God. This is true of every man ordained to the Apostolic ministry. The people of God, the church that is, need deacons to preach the Word with the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The people need priests, to celebrate the Eucharist, the holy Mass, to

make real the certainty of the Lord's presence in the Sacraments of Holy Communion, Holy Unction, and Penance. The people need bishops to provide the charism of the apostles to them, as well as to ordain those called to serve the People in Holy Orders.

It is indeed an overwhelming honour and a great responsibility that is conferred upon us members of the Apostolic ministry to be the servants of God's people in the deeply spiritual moments of their lives. After all, who am I? Just a sinner, like you, yet one who is called and empowered to stand at the altar on your behalf, one who is empowered to make Christ's forgiveness real for you. A priest is called upon to celebrate moments of joy: marriage and baptisms, as well as moments of sadness: sickness and death, trusting in the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church and at work through the priestly ministry. I cannot adequately express to you how deeply a deacon, priest or bishop, is honoured and humbled, when we are called upon to be whom we have been ordained to be for you in your life's journey.

So what does being a priest mean? It means everything. It means being a man whom God has ordained to serve Him by serving you - His faithful people. The diaconate, priesthood, and episcopate would not exist without you – the faithful people of God. We are who we are, so you can be all that God calls you to be. What a blessing this is.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Apostolic Ministry as it is often called, is a great blessing to the whole church and to the world and so I conclude these words tonight by calling on men in this

church, whether you are a young man or a mature man, to consider answering the call to serve God and his church in the Apostolic ministry of deacons, priests and bishops.