

Permanent Diaconate Ordinations 06

The perfectly qualified clergy

A member of the "pick-a-preacher" committee was getting a bit fed up. One after another, prospective candidates were rejected because somebody found a flaw. So this seasoned Christian stood up and read them a letter. It went like this.

"Friends. Understanding that your pulpit is vacant, I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. "I've been a preacher with much success and also had some success as a writer. Some say I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader most places I've been. "I'm over 50 years of age. I have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places I have left town after my work had caused riots and disturbances. "I must admit I have been in jail three or four times but not because of any real wrongdoing." My health is not good, though I still get a great deal done.

"The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I've not got along well with the religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. "I'm not too good at keeping records, and have been known to forget whom I have baptized. "However, if you can use me, I'll do my best for you." The pick-a-preacher committee was aghast! "An unhealthy, trouble-making, absent minded ex-jailbird? Are you kidding?" Then they were shown the signature at the bottom of the letter. It was signed, "The Apostle Paul."

A deacon's vocation is to make the bishop and priests look good and there are two dimensions to the ministry of the deacons: an extra-faith and an intra-faith dimension:

1. "Extra-faith" Dimension.

Isaiah: *"Is this not the sort of fast that pleases me: to break unjust fetters, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break all yokes? Is it not sharing food with the hungry, and sheltering the homeless poor; if you see someone lacking clothes, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own kin?"*

These are all the services which we **render to** our brothers and sisters as **the outcome of our faith and baptism and conversion to Christ**, but which can be done by many others and in collaboration with others: the care of the sick, handicapped and elderly, legal and social services, teaching, and coming to the aid of prisoners.

For the Christian these ministries and other works of mercy and assistance arise from faith but in themselves, they can arise simply from a desire for humanity and solidarity with one's fellow human beings. For the Christian, they have a particular quality because they are **the fruit** of mature faith but as far as **their object** is concerned they are indistinguishable from the services of non-Christians.

Jesus seemed so intent upon instilling in his disciples those attitudes which make up a mature person, able to recognize the needs and sufferings of others. As deacons you must respond to the more immediate needs, such as sickness, hunger, loneliness and various kinds of alienation, and if we have developed a sensitivity to these things, you will also understand people's most hidden needs - the most subtle needs which are linked to the inmost personality -

Think of the educational value of the miracles witnessed by the disciples, miracles which embrace all sort of human suffering: from disease to disgrace, from obsessions to physical and psychological pain.

The disciples who witness these things come in close contact with these people and see how much evil there is in the world, how much suffering, rejection and depravity, and learn how to respond to each situation with love, sensitivity and empathy. They are given lessons in goodness, charity and compassion for all the sufferings of people. They are taught that openness of heart which was so characteristic of Jesus; Peter summing up Jesus' life, said: "***He went about doing good to all, healing all the oppressed***" (Acts 10:38). Jesus teaches his disciples to share his own sensitive and ready compassion and his capacity to see the suffering and distress of others.

Extra-faith ministries are in fact essential stepping stones to deeper things.

2. "Intra-faith" Dimension

The object is **the service of the faith**.

Eph. - "*And to some, his gift was that they should be apostles, to some prophets; to some evangelists; to some, pastors and teacher to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form that perfect Man fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.*"

The service of the faith includes the various forms of evangelization, the pastoral ministry and the care and doctrinal instruction of the community. These two dimensions of ministry are linked to one another: "extra-faith" ministries deal with **human advancement**, while "intra-faith" ministries deal with **evangelization**, in which the faith itself is the gift given.

For the Christian a faith ministry is the greatest possible service that can be rendered. We have many different needs, but our deepest need is surely for faith, hope and unlimited love. All the other services to humanity are useful but the most glorious of all is **the ministry of ministries**, the one which gives us the strength to live and to hope. It is important to provide bread and justice and the chance to live a human life: but if one does not go on to give men and women a profound reason for living, what is the use of giving them all the other things? The Christian serves humanity in a specifically Christian way knowing that such service is indispensable if all the other services are to lead to the satisfaction of all human needs.