



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEACONS

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UPDATE
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Pope Francis in Milan

Dear all

My usual sources haven't yet published the full official translation of the Pope's comments on the diaconate when he was in Milan. I've taken this from <http://aleteia.org/blogs/deacon-greg-kandra/pope-francis-you-deacons-have-much-to-give/>

I'm sure some of you will have seen it, but here it is for those of you who haven't.

Pope Francis: 'You deacons have much to give'

Question 2 – Roberto Crespi, permanent deacon

Your Holiness, good morning. I am Roberto, a permanent deacon. The diaconate entered into our clergy 1990, and of whom there are now 143 of us; it is not a large number but it is a significant number. We are men who live their vocation fully; either in marriage or celibacy, but we also live fully in the world of work and of the professions, and therefore bring the clergy into the world of families and the world of work, we bring all those dimensions of beauty and experience but also hardship and at times suffering. So, we ask you: as permanent deacons, what is our role in giving form to the face that Church that is humble, that is selfless, that is blessed, that we feel she is in her heart, and of which often you speak to us? Thank you for your attention, and I assure you of our prayer, and that of our wives and families.

Pope Francis:

Thank you. You deacons have much to give, much to give. I think of the value of discernment. Within the presbytery, you can be an authoritative voice to show the tension there is between duty and will, the tensions that one lives in family life – you have a mother in law, for example! And also the blessings one lives within family life.

But we must be careful not to see deacons as half priests, half laypeople. This is a danger. At the end they will end up neither one nor the other. No, we must not do this, it is a danger. Looking at them in this way harms us and harms them. This way of considering them takes strength from the charism proper to the diaconate. I want to return to this: the charism proper to the diaconate. And this charism is in the life of the Church. Likewise the image of the deacon as a sort of intermediary between the faithful and pastors is inappropriate. Neither halfway between priests and laypeople, nor halfway between pastors and faithful. There is the danger of clericalism: the deacon who is too clerical. No, no, this is not good. At times I see someone who assists at the liturgy: it almost seems as if he wants to take the place of the priest. Clericalism, beware of clericalism. And another temptation is functionalism: it is a help that the priest has for this or that; a boy to carry out certain tasks and not for other things. No. You have a clear charism in the Church and you must build it.

The diaconate is a specific vocation, a family vocation that requires service. I like it very much when [in the Acts of the Apostles] the first Hellenistic Christians went to the apostles to complain because their widows and orphans were not well cared for, and they had a meeting, that “synod” between apostles and disciples, and they “invented” the deacons to serve. And this is very interesting for us bishops too, because they were all bishops, those who “made” the deacons. And what does this tell us? That deacons were servants. Then they understood that, in that case, it was to assist widows and orphans: but to serve. And to us as bishops: prayer and the proclamation of the Word; and this shows us what the most important charism of a bishop is: to pray. What is the task of a bishop, the first task? Prayer. Second task: proclaiming the Word. But you can see the difference clearly. And for you [deacons]: service. This word is the key to understanding your charism. Service as one of the characteristic gifts of the people of God. The deacon is, so to say, the custodian of service in the Church. Every word must be carefully measured. You are the guardians of service in the Church: service to the Word, service to the Altar, service to the poor. And your mission, the mission of the deacon, and your contribution consist in this: in reminding us all that faith, in its various expressions – community liturgy, personal prayer, the various forms of charity – and in its various states of life – lay, clerical, family – possesses an essential dimension of service. Service to God and to brothers. And how far we have to go in this sense! You are the guardians of service in the Church.

Therein lies the value of the charisms in the Church, which are a memory and a gift for helping all the people of God not to lose the perspective and wealth of God’s action. You are not half priests, half laypeople – this would be to “functionalize” the diaconate – you are the sacrament of service to God and to others. And from this word “service” there derives all the development of your work, of your vocation, of your being within the Church. A vocation that, like all vocations is not only individual, but lived within the family and with the family; within the People of God and with the People of God.

In summary:

- there is no altar service, there is no liturgy that is not open to the poor, and there no service to the poor that does not lead to the liturgy;
- there is no ecclesial vocation that is not of the family.

This helps us to re-evaluate the diaconate as an ecclesial vocation.

Finally, today it seems that everything must be useful to us, as if everything were targeted at the individual: prayer is useful to me, the community is useful to me,

charity is useful to me. This is a feature of our culture. You are the gift that the Spirit gives us to show that the right path goes in the opposite direction: in prayer I serve, in the community I serve, with solidarity I serve God and my neighbour. And may God give you the grace to grow in this charism of safeguarding service in the Church. Thank you for what you do.

Nick Kerr, NAD chair, 30 May 2016