

Homily for the Diaconate of Peter Morris.

The Decree on The Church describes the role of those who undertake the ministry of deacon in these words:

“Strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the people of God, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel, and of works of charity>”

“Strengthened by grace.”

The undertaking you make today, Peter, you do not make alone. You make it by God’s grace and it will be the same grace that will sustain you in the daily, mostly ordinary and mundane, routine of ministry. It is by the same grace that your ministry will bear fruit. The mystery of the grace of God at work in us and through us is at the heart of the first parable we heard just a few moments ago. The farmer in the parable plants the seed and witnesses it sprouting and growing. “How, he does not know”, Mark tells us. Although he doesn’t understand how it is happening he is grateful and he is ready when the crop is ready. The parable reminds us that God is at work in us and around us, even when, and perhaps especially when, we are not aware of it. A remind, too, Peter, that in our ministry, we might plant and water, but it is always God who gives the increase.

Dedicated to the People of God.

As bishop, priest and deacon, we are bound closely and irrevocably to the People of God whom we are called to serve in the Church. How closely we are bound is beautifully expressed in the passage from the first letter of Peter we heard a few moments ago. He is writing to Christian Churches largely made up of converts from paganism. The letter reflects the time of trial through which the churches are passing and contains much practical teaching. Not least among this practical teaching, are the words we heard today directed towards you, Peter, who are about to commit yourself to a new public ministry in the Church and an uncomfortable reminder to those of us who already share in it.

Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, because God wants it; not for any sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock will follow.

As deacon, this dedication is expressed in the threefold service of the Liturgy, the Gospel and the Poor.

The Liturgy

Part of your duty will be to lead the people in prayer and, in particular, to place yourself at the service of the Eucharist- the great mystery of faith. St. JP II describes the Eucharist in these words:

“The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ – not as one gift, however precious, among many others, but as the gift par excellence, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity.”

The People of God will come to a fuller and deeper understanding of these mysteries if all that you do and say at the altar underscores the holiness of the encounter with the living Christ, which is the Eucharist.

The Gospel

In a few moments I will present you with the Book of the Gospels with these words:

“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become.”

It will be your duty to break open the Word of God for others by what you say and do. The official homily text for the ordination of a deacon expresses it in these words:

“Now you must not only listen to God’s Word but you must also preach it. Hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. Express in action what you proclaim by word of mouth.”

The Poor

Finally, as deacon, to you is entrusted in a special way the ministry of charity that is at the origin of institution of the diaconate in the Church. As deacon you are called to be the living and working expression of the charity of the Church. As deacon, you are called to indentify those who are in need and respond in the name of the Church. There is a lovely story told of St Lawrence, the 3rd century Roman martyr who when he was ordered by the pagan emperor to hand over the treasures of the Church, he gathered together the poor and the sick and said, “This is the treasure of the Church.”

It will be your duty as deacon to remind us that among the needy, is the true treasure of the church.

There is plenty to do in months ahead. I pray that the Lord who has begun this good word in you will bring it to completion.