

Deacon Steve Moses – Homily given on the Feast of St. Lawrence 2006

Last year on this very feast of St. Lawrence I found myself receiving a great blessing at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls of Rome.

I was part of a pilgrimage from our parish to Rome, Assisi, and on to Cologne to meet the new pope at the 2005 World Youth Day.

As a group we were to celebrate Mass in the Chapel of St. Stephen, on the feast of St. Lawrence, and I Steven, a deacon of the Church, was to preach on a deacons feast day.

Saint Lawrence, whose feast we celebrate today was a deacon and martyr. He died in 258. Lawrence followed Pope Sixtus to martyrdom.

Ordered by civil authorities to inventory church wealth, Lawrence assembled victims of governmental neglect whom the Roman church was clothing, feeding, and sheltering, then led the inspectors to the hall where they were gathered and exclaimed: "Behold, the treasures of the church!"

Sentenced to be burned alive on a grid iron, Lawrence offered one last quip: "Turn me over now—I'm done on this side!"

No frivolous joker, Lawrence epitomizes the unshakeable fortitude of one whose intimate friendship with his crucified and risen Lord makes him "a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7) to the very end.

Lawrence is not only a saint but a stewardship example for all of us.

I want to share with you some of what it means to be a deacon in the Church. And I feel it can best be explained through the Rite of Ordination.

In the ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops, there are many prayers and petitions calling upon the Holy Spirit to help make the man to be ordained a true servant of the Church, with the grace needed to fulfill the office to which he is about to be ordained.

I want to share with you some of my experience the day I was ordained a deacon.

Ordination takes place within the Mass.

After the Liturgy of the Word each of us to be ordained was called forth from the assembly by the deacon of the Mass who said, “Those to be ordained deacons please come forward”.

After our full name was called we each in turn said, “Present”, and went forward up to the altar.

We were then presented to the Archbishop by a priest...

Priest: Most Reverend Father, holy mother Church asks you to ordain these men, our brothers, for service as deacons

Archbishop: Do you judge them to be worthy?

Priest: After inquiry among the people of Christ and upon recommendation of those concerned with their training, I testify that they have been found worthy.

What followed was then the Election by the Bishop and Consent of the People of God.

Archbishop Flynn replied: We rely on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, and we choose these men, our brothers, for the order of deacons.

We then sat for the homily. Don't worry; I don't remember everything he said and I won't try and repeat it all. J

But it is worth noting that he concluded by saying something very similar to this found in the Rite of Ordination...

These men, your relatives and friends, are now to be raised to the order of deacons. Consider carefully the ministry to which they are promoted.

They will draw new strength from the gift of the Holy Spirit. They will help the bishop and his body of priests as a minister of the word, of the altar, and of charity. They will make themselves a servant to all.

As ministers of the altar they will proclaim the Gospel, prepare the sacrifice, and give the Lord's body and blood to the community of believers.

It will also be their duty, at the bishop's discretion, to bring God's word to believer and unbeliever alike, to preside over public prayer, to baptize, to assist at marriages and bless them, to give viaticum to the dying, and to lead the rites of burial.

Once they are consecrated by the laying on of hands that comes to us from the apostles and are bound more closely to the altar, they will perform works of charity in the name of the bishop or the pastor.

From the way they go about these duties, may you recognize them as disciples of Jesus who came to serve, not to be served.

Archbishop Flynn then examined each of us with these questions...

My sons, before you are ordained deacons, you must declare before the people your intention to undertake the office.

Are you willing to be ordained for the Church's ministry by the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Candidates: I am

Archbishop:

Are you resolved to hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, as the Apostle urges, to proclaim this faith in word and action as it is taught by the Gospel and the Church's tradition?

Candidates: I am

Archbishop:

Are you resolved to maintain and deepen a spirit of prayer appropriate to your way of life and, in keeping with what is required of you, to celebrate faithfully the liturgy of the hours for the Church and for the whole world?

Candidates: I am

Archbishop:

Are you resolved to shape your way of life always according to the example of Christ, whose body and blood you will give to the people?

Candidates: I am, with the help of God

We then individually knelt before Archbishop Flynn; he had one more important question...

Archbishop:

Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?

Candidates: I do

He then said:

May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

More prayers follow, and as we 12 men lay prostrate before the altar, the Litany of Saints was prayed in song calling upon the saints to be present with us and to pray for us.

Then with the silent laying on of hands by the Archbishop, at that moment, I became a deacon forever.

Assisting deacons then gave each of us the Stole and Dalmatic as signs of our ministry.

One last time I went before the Archbishop and kneeled. I was presented with the Book of the Gospels...

The Archbishop said:

Receive the Gospel of Christ,

whose herald you now are.

Believe what you read,

teach what you believe,

and practice what you teach.

The Ordination ended with the Kiss of Peace.

The Archbishop concluded by saying: Peace be with you.

And so I end my homily on this feast of St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr, and I pray: Peace be with you.