

## Rite of Candidacy for Permanent Deacons/First Bi-Lingual Class

(Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8; 1Cor.9:16-19;22-23; Mark 1:14-20)

September 28, 2019

St. Jerome Parish, BC

10:00 a.m.

What a joyful and important day for our entire Diocese, and how appropriate that we have such a wonderful representation of the entire Church here this morning---and a good portion of the entire Presbyterate with so many of our priests, deacons, along with so many representatives from our 59 parishes. In the name of the entire Church, I welcome each and every one of you.

In particular, I am grateful to Father Chris Ankley, the pastor of St. Jerome Parish who is extending such hospitality to all of us today, and for allowing St. Jerome Parish to be our new Center for Diaconal Formation. I am also very grateful to Father German Perez-Diaz, the Director of Diaconate Formation, along with Fr. Jose Haro, who works so closely with him, for all your very careful oversight and direction of these men, and their wives, in this process of diaconate formation.

It's a joy to welcome our Candidates' wives, and other family members and friends, and, most of all, a warm welcome to you, our dear soon-to-be-Candidates, and our first bi-lingual Class, the Class of 2023.

It is so good for all of us to be together here for this very special moment in the life of our Local Church. We are about to welcome these 14 men---your husbands, fathers, sons, relatives and friends---our sons and brothers in the Lord---into the special category of "Candidates" for Holy Orders, and specifically, for the Order of the Diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Rite of Admission, which follows very soon, beautifully reflects on the requirements and expectations of being a Candidate for Holy Orders, and, in that Rite, formally asks each of you for your willingness, your readiness, your openness, and your acceptance of this very important, public, action which we all take together here today.

But before that, I would like to offer my own brief reflections on the importance of this "moment", both for you, and for our local Church. To do so, I draw on the beautiful Scripture Readings we just heard proclaimed, from Isaiah, the great Old Testament Prophet of God; from St. Paul, the amazing Missionary Apostle; and, of course, from Jesus Himself, our Lord and Savior, the Master with Whom we are His unworthy, but very willing, joyful disciples.

In our First Reading from Isaiah, we heard his very personal reflection on his own call to be God's Prophet. He felt unworthy, incapable, and afraid. So God gave him this powerful vision, in which he was able to see the Glory of God, and the Heavenly Hosts were proclaiming the constant refrain: "*Holy, Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts; Santo, Santo, Santo!---All the earth is filled with His Glory!*" Of course, Isaiah felt even more unworthy, until the Angel came with the burning ember, touched his lips, and purged his sin. Then, with his sin removed, his willingness to serve took over and he proclaimed: "Here I am; send me."

That's the first point I would make to you: "**The willingness to serve God enables us to say: 'Here I am; send me'.**" "***La disposición para servir a Dios nos permite decir: "Aquí estoy, envíame."***"

Obviously, you're not making that kind of missionary statement today for the first time. Each of you has been on a Faith journey all thru your lifetime. And only you, your spouse, and your spiritual director know all the twists and turns your life has taken, including in your faith life. But for you to be here today, ready to express your willingness to become a Candidate for Holy Orders, you had to have said those same words of willingness to God multiple times in the past. And guess what? You'll need to do so hundreds of times in the future----in fact, that would be a good prayer to say each and every morning when you get out of bed: "Here I am, Lord; send me to do whatever I can do in Your Holy Name this day."

In our Second Reading this morning, we heard St. Paul, in his first Letter to the Corinthians, reflecting on his responsibility of preaching God's Word---a responsibility that no one took as seriously as Paul did. You too, my brothers, are preparing yourselves to become Preachers of the Good News of Jesus. It's not "one among many" things that a Deacon gets to do; it's part of who a Deacon is---to proclaim God's life-saving Word. But before you can preach the Word, you must be changed to the core of your beings by the power of God's Holy Word; and obviously, you must live the Word faithfully, completely and joyfully. Then, and only then, can you take on, what St. Paul describes as, the "*obligation...imposed on me*". So serious an obligation that we must make sure that we preach what God says, and not our version of it. Because of that, St. Paul says: "*Woe to me if I do not preach it.*"

And so, that is my second point that I share with you today, in the spirit of St. Paul's words: **"I want to become all things to all people to bring salvation to all."** **"Quiero convertirme en todas las cosas para todos para traer la salvación a todas las personas."**

Finally, in this morning's Gospel passage from St. Mark, we see Jesus at the very beginning of His public ministry. He began going thru the countryside, proclaiming a summary of the Gospel message: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*" And then, immediately, He began calling people to join Him in this venture of saving the world. He called Peter and Andrew, James and John----simple men, some married with families, hard-working and faithful. But Jesus saw something in them that caused Him to extend the invitation: "*Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

Each of you has heard Jesus calling you many times, in many different ways. You heard Jesus call you to be a Believer----to be a Christian----to be a Catholic Christian----to be a joyful Disciple. You've heard Jesus' call to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage, to be a faithful and loving spouse, to be a generous and life-giving parent, to be a hard-working and supportive provider for your family. But in recent years, you've heard Jesus calling you to do something more---something special; you've heard Him call you to the Diaconate. Because that is a Sacred and Holy Order within the Church, the Church must accompany you along this path of Discernment and Formation, to make sure that what you're hearing, and what the Church is hearing, are the same thing.

But that is my third point that I want you to hear today: **"Our willingness to be sent, enables us to hear Jesus' Call: 'Come, follow Me'."** **"Nuestra voluntad de ser enviados nos permite escuchar el llamado de Jesús: "Ven, sígueme."**

It is my hope and prayer that these three points, taken from God's Holy Word for this Mass, will help to focus your understanding of what being a Candidate for Holy Orders means, and what it requires. It is also my hope that all of us can see the ways in which this same Word of God applies to each of us in our own lives, as Deacons for a few years or many years; whether we are priest or bishop or layperson. As a Candidate for the Holy Order of Deacon, the needs

of the world become your needs and concerns. The prayers, works, joys, and hopes of the Church must become your prayers, works, joys and hopes as well. And you must see that you represent the Church, not just sometimes, not just when you're in class, not just after Ordination, or not only when you're functioning as a Deacon, but always, and in all ways.

These are difficult times in which we are living. But that's been true throughout the history of the Church. Today, the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, the Church celebrates two different Martyrs: St. Wenceslaus, who lived in the 900's and was the Duke of Bohemia, and who died protecting the Faith at the hands of his own brother who wanted his throne. And we also celebrate St. Lawrence Ruiz and his 15 companions who were priests, religious women, and laypeople, from a variety of countries, but who were a part of the Dominican mission society to evangelize in Japan in the 1600's. They were tortured mercilessly but remained strong in their faith until the end. St. Lawrence, a layman, originally from the Philippines, mustered up all his strength before he died to say: *"I am a Catholic and wholeheartedly serve God. If I had a thousand lives, I would freely offer them all to Him."* *"Soy católico y de todo corazón sirvo a Dios. Si tuviera mil vidas, las ofrecería libremente a Él."*

We must always look to the Saints, especially the Martyrs, because they stand as Models for all of us---people just like us, who lived in different times and places, but who dealt with the same problems and challenges that each of us faces as well. They provide us with the evidence that Faith in God is what makes sense of our lives, and gives us the meaning we need to follow Jesus wherever He leads us.

Dear Sons in the Lord, as you become Candidates for the Holy Order of the Diaconate, I urge you to stay close to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and our own Blessed Mother. She was not only Jesus' Mother, but also His first Disciple. She wants nothing more than to help us to stay close to her Son, Jesus. Stay close to her, and we will stay close to Him. We are very happy for you on this special day. We promise you our prayers, our support, our encouragement and our fraternal affection as, together---you and your spouses, along with me and the whole Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo---we all discern Jesus' Call to you to become Holy Deacons of His Church.

God bless you, now and always!