



**Diaconate Ordination of Marlon Henao-Perez, Alexis Vega-Osorio and Noe Navarrete Apaez – Homily**

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In the Book of Genesis, where the beautiful story of the creation of the world is recounted, we are told that, after sin enters into the world, that sin begins to spread. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, turn away from God and make their own desires the ultimate criterion for their actions. The awful power of sin is unleashed in the world and, once Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, their sin is replicated in the terrible murder of Abel by his brother, Cain. When, in the story, God comes looking for Abel and asks Cain where his brother is, Cain replies with disrespect and arrogance, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

When Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in answer to the query of the scribe who asks him, "Who is my neighbour?", He gives the divine answer to Abel's question. The answer is "Yes - you are your brother's keeper. You are responsible for him".

This idea of mutual responsibility and of our dependence on each other is at the very heart of our Christian and Catholic faith. It explains why Jesus called a group of disciples together and formed them into a community rather than just calling isolated individuals. It explains why He promised to send the Spirit of truth to His community once He had returned to His Father in heaven so that the community might remain united in the truth. It explains why the bishops at the Second Vatican Council spoke of the Church as a sacrament of communion and unity. It also explains why the Lord gave His Church the gift of the ordained ministry.

We are all called into the Church, not just for our own sakes but for the sake of others, and the gifts we are given and the way of life to which we are called, are always for the service of our brothers and sisters in the faith, and for all our brothers and sisters in the whole human race. We are, indeed, our brother's keeper. The whole world is our neighbour.

Within this mystery of communion in the Church, then, the diaconate, like all vocations, has its own special role and significance. For our three brothers, Marlon, Alexis and Noe who are to be ordained this evening, it is important that we all understand what the Lord is asking of them and why the Lord is giving them to us as a special gift.

At its heart, our vocation as Christians is a missionary one. For some, it may mean taking the Gospel overseas to people who have not yet truly heard it, and this may well be the case at some stage for our three brothers ordained this evening. For others, it may mean proclaiming the Gospel to the people around us who equally may never really have heard it. For others, again, it may mean being living signs of the joy of the Gospel to our families, our friends and



those we meet each day. Each one of us must read in our own hearts what it is God is asking of us and where God is sending us.

However, no matter what God asks of us, it will be beyond our capacities if we rely on ourselves alone and our own insights or gifts. At times, we will all be overwhelmed by the struggles of our lives, the difficulties of our situation, the burden of our own sins and the sins of others. At such times, we will need people around us who, because of their own faith, can encourage us, support us and inspire us. We will need living models, living sacraments, both of all we are being called to do and be, and of the presence of the Lord whose grace alone will enable us to respond to all that God is asking of us.

Deacons are called to be, and ordained and empowered to be, such living models, living sacraments, for us. But sacraments of what? By their lives, and their ministry, they will put before us more than anything else the truth that service is at the heart of the Christian response to life. Others will do this for us, too, of course, but you – Marlon, Noe and Alexis – are taking this on as your life's work. The beauty and the challenge of true, disinterested and humble service must now shine out from you as never before. This is what you are called to – what we desperately need from you – not to relieve us from the responsibility to serve but to remind us of how essential this is to every Christian life.

As deacons, of course, you will serve the people of God especially through your presence at the Eucharistic Liturgy, where the very simplicity and unobtrusiveness of your role will remind us all, laity and clergy, that prominent positions and high-profile roles have nothing to do with the Gospel and that, as soon as we begin to talk the language of power and authority and influence, instead of the language of service, we have begun to lose sight of the Gospel.

You will also serve the people of God in other forms of sacramental ministry, making yourselves available to meet these vital needs of God's people, even when it is inconvenient or uncongenial for you. But, more than all this, important though it is, you will take on, through the power of God's Spirit, an inner attitude of mind and heart, and outward actions which reveal it, which show that you are profoundly and irrevocably united with the one who described Himself as "meek and humble" of heart and who told His followers, His disciples, to learn this from Him.

If you are going to be these living sacraments of the meek and humble one, the one who came only to be served, then perhaps tonight's first reading, coupled with an image recently expressed by Pope Francis, might serve as a guiding motif for your ministry as deacons.

The powerful imagery of dry bones gradually coming to life through the power of God's Spirit (Holy Bible, Book of Ezekiel 37, verses 1-14) chimes beautifully with Pope Francis' description of the Church as a field hospital in which people's wounds are healed and their hearts are warmed. Wounded lives and cold hearts are all around us: the Gospel of Jesus is a message of life and joy, not of despondency and death. It is a source of healing and warmth.

It will be your responsibility and your privilege, through your service at the altar, through your ministry of preaching and catechising, but equally through your humble availability and the compassionate heart you bring to all your encounters with your brothers and sisters, both in the Church and beyond its visible boundaries, to express a quality of warmth and healing which will enable people to see the face and heart of Christ revealed in you. Then, people will know that



you really do, as I will soon say to you in the ordination rite, believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practise what you teach.