

Diaconate Mass May 17, 2014 Acts 8:26-40; Eph 4:1-7, 11-13; Jn 15:9-17
(Cathedral: Robert Bacik and David Fons and their family members; thanks to Fr. John Linden and the Formation Department, including Anne Rivet and Jane Sessions; thanks to the instructors and parishes and priests of Sacred Heart Seminary who have helped form these men; and to the parishes from which they come)

My dear sisters and brothers, these your sons, brothers, and friends, are now to be advanced to the Order of Deacon. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, they will help me and the priests in the ministry of the Word, of the Altar, and of charity. With the help of God, they will go about all these duties in such a way that you will recognize them as disciples of Jesus who came not to be served, but to serve.

For whom are you, Robert and David, to be ordained today? That might seem an odd question for me to pose at this stage of your life since you have been preparing for years to be ordained for service to the Church and particularly this Church of the Diocese of Lansing. However, what does this Church of Lansing look like, this Church which today becomes the focus of your ministrations? Certainly, many and diverse aspects could be presented to you, but let us limit ourselves to three, as presented by our readings today. These readings describe three kinds of people in our

Church whom you will serve: first, there are those who are eager, who will simply consume you, as the zealous Ethiopian eunuch in our first reading today; then there are those of a more disputatious bent who need to hear Paul's clarion call for unity; and finally there are the many weak and feeble and timid like the apostles in today's Gospel who only need to be told to cling to, to abide in Christ. Let us examine each of these for a moment.

The treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia, also called the Candace, is a eunuch and we are not given his name. He is heading back home to Ethiopia after having worshipped in Jerusalem. He is reading the prophet Isaiah and wants to know who this suffering servant of God is. This is an easy catch. This is the good soil of Jesus' parable of the sower. You will find many of these among those you are called to serve. They will be eager to know Jesus. It will be, in fact, the mission arena which the Holy Spirit will set before you like a rich table. You will have to run and catch up with the Spirit. The Spirit will be moving. Don't frustrate the Holy Spirit or let him down. Run to keep up. Your own love of Jesus, and your knowledge, well-honed over these years, will serve you well. But always delight here in the work of the Spirit—take little credit yourself—and by all means, keep up. They need a guide as the eunuch explained to Philip and guides you must needs be.

For many others, you will not be able to run. The work will be much more carefully done, with greater patience. With these you will walk, as Paul puts it in the fourth chapter of his Letter to the Ephesians. Paul deals with, as he usually does, factions, divisions, splits in the communities he served. This is not easy work but the task is to build up unity—to see that all gifts are from God for one purpose only—the building up of the Body of Christ. We are to be one because God is one, our faith is one, and our baptism is one.

Yet, as we know, there are various spiritualities, for example, those of Apollos and of Paul and of many others; there are those who may emphasize the cross of Christ and others the Resurrection. You will encounter all this and more and you are asked not to dismiss anyone but rather to walk with them all—to accompany each and every. St. Paul tells us we are to equip them to become mature and perfect in the Body of Christ. It is amazing that the Greek word which we translate as “equip” also is used for “setting a bone.” There will be much that seems out of place or broken in our Church; help set it aright. This is the field hospital or the triage unit of which Pope Francis speaks so pointedly. This is where you will find yourselves serving.

How should you go about this? The gifts that Paul says come from Christ for this purpose are all gifts of preaching and teaching. Listen to the

list: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. Even those with the gift of pastoring have as their primary task the shepherding of the flock against false doctrine. So preach and teach, but do so gently, not by running too far ahead, but by walking with all those you are called to serve.

Finally, Jesus provides the ultimate model of your service as ordained ministers. Look at the crew he faced on that Thursday evening before the sacred Passover. Indeed they were a timid bunch—confused—unclear on the concept. They would not be able or willing to step out for the Lord. It is fascinating that Jesus thus makes no heroic demands on them. He doesn't tell them to buck up and get out there; he doesn't tell them to arm themselves and defend him to the last man. He only asks them to abide, to rest. And this is where the divine example is so helpful to you. He helps them to abide by calling them friends.

Many of our sisters and brothers in the faith, perhaps the majority, are not contentious and probably not as eager as the Ethiopian. But they are our sisters and brothers, redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb. They need be only gently prepared for the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Jesus shows us how to do that—by being friends, by calling them to friendship with Jesus, by abiding with them. Perhaps we cannot run here or even walk here. But we can maintain the link with the vine to help them confront the

crosses in their lives and allow them to be ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit in God's good time. This is also where your commitment to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom will prove most helpful. You will with an undivided heart give yourself completely to Christ, whose celibacy you will imitate, and thus be completely at the service of all your sisters and brothers.

So Robert and David, if you as deacons of the Church are to have the smell of the sheep, know that the sheep are a varied bunch—with some be prepared to run, with others to walk, and with all to abide in friendship. As you are this day conformed to Christ the Servant, you will not be lacking in opportunities to be a Philip or a Paul or Jesus himself. Then, at the end of the day, you will hear the Lord say, "Welcome, good and faithful servant."

God bless you all.