



MESSAGE TO THE PERMANENT DEACONS
Message of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy

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Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy

Dear Permanent Deacons,

It is indeed a great joy for me to be able to turn my thoughts to you on the feast of St Laurence deacon and martyr, in this my first year as Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy.

You have always occupied a privileged place in my heart. I admire you and wish to say that I see a precious grace of the Lord to His people in the restoration of Permanent Diaconate following Vatican Council II. This ordained ministry has great potential value and is highly topical in the context of the mission of the Church.

I thank God for the calling you have received and for your generous response. For the majority of you, who are married, this response has also been made possible by the love, support and cooperation of your wives and children.

Concerning deacons, Vatican Council II stated that '*sustained by the sacramental grace in the ministry of the liturgy, preaching and charity, they are at the service of the people of God*' (LG 29). Your ministry is '*ministry of the Church in the local Christian community, sign and sacrament of Christ the Lord Himself, who did not come to be served but to serve*' (Paul *Ad Pascendum*, Introduction). Quite rightly Ignatius of Antioch says that deacons are '*ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ...ministers of the Church of God*' (S. Ignatii Antiocheni, *Ad Trallianos*, II,3).

Vatican Council II also explains that the sacramental grace conferred through the imposition of hands enables you to exercise your service of the word, of the altar and charity with special effectiveness (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 16).

Therefore you have been ordained for the service of the Word of God. This means that all that concerns the preaching of the Gospel, catechesis, spreading of the Bible and explanation to the people is ordinarily entrusted to you, though naturally under the authority of your Bishop. Nowadays the Church calls all Her members, especially ordained ministers, to missionary activity, i.e. to rise and move in an organic way firstly towards our baptised who have drifted away from the practice of their Catholic faith, but also towards those who know little or nothing

of Jesus Christ and His message, in order to proclaim the Christian message, the kerygma, for the first time and through this to take them to a real and concrete encounter with the Lord. In this encounter faith is renewed and personal acceptance of Jesus Christ and His message is strengthened. This is the foundation of true faith and faithful witness in the world. We can no longer limit ourselves to waiting for our baptised in our churches. We need to find them where they live and work, through a permanent missionary activity, with special attention towards the poor in the suburbs of our cities. This ministry of the Word requires that you, dear Deacons, develop a constant closeness with the Holy Scriptures, and in particular with the Gospels. May listening, meditating, studying and practising the Word of God become your everyday tasks. In this way you will become more disciples of the Lord and you will feel called and enlightened by the Holy Spirit for your mission.

You have been ordained for a liturgical-sacramental service. You have your own liturgical functions in the celebration and giving out of the Eucharist, the centre of the life of the Church and, therefore, also the centre of the life of ordained ministers. Your ministry entrusts a special responsibility to you for what concerns the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. The Bishop may entrust to you all that concerns baptismal and matrimonial-family pastoral care.

You have been ordained for charity. You have many things to do, to organise, and to animate! The poor, the disenfranchised, the unemployed, the hungry, all that are reduced to extreme misery, an innumerable crowd, raise their hands and their voice to the Church. Deacons play a vital role for them both historically and in view of their ordination. Charity, solidarity towards the poor, social justice, have always been an ambit of extreme urgency that challenges Christians, as Christ said: 'through this everyone will know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another' (Jn, 13:35).

Dear Permanent Deacons, once again I would like to convey all my affection and gratitude. I greet your wives and your families. Witness the love of God! I entrust you to the Most Holy Mary who continues to proclaim: 'I am the handmaid of the Lord' (Lk 1:38). And following the example of her service, we too serve our brothers and sisters in the great family of humanity and of the Church. My blessing is upon you all!

From the Vatican, 10th of August 2007

Feast of St Laurence, deacon and martyr

Claudio Card. Hummes

Prefect