

September 25, 2021

10:00 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Rite of Lector for Candidates for Permanent Diaconate

(Neh. 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 2 Tim.3:14-17; Lk. 4:16-21)

Words of Welcome at Beginning:

Welcome to St. Augustine Cathedral, the Mother Church of our Diocese.

Bienvenidos a la Catedral de San Agustín, la Iglesia Madre de nuestra Diócesis.

This is truly one of those days that, as we will hear in today's First Reading, *"Today is holy to the Lord your God; do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!"* **Este es verdaderamente uno de esos días que, como escucharemos en la Primera Lectura de hoy, "Hoy es un día santo para el Señor tu Dios; no te entristezcas hoy, porque el regocijo en el Señor debe ser tu fuerza."**

It was almost exactly a year ago that we all joined together at St. Jerome Parish to celebrate the Candidacy of these 15 men for the Permanent Diaconate. And following a year of many challenges as the Pandemic has remained with us, you have all faithfully continued your intensive Formation process. Now we come together again, this time here in our beautifully renovated Cathedral, to celebrate another important moment in your Journey toward Ordination as a Deacon in the Church.

We are so pleased that you are accompanied by members of your families and your parishes, along with a large representation from our already ordained Deacons, as well as many priests, including your Pastors----as you are about to be instituted into the special Ministry of Lector.

We rejoice with you, but we also rejoice as a Local Church, because this *"rejoicing in the Lord must be our strength"---"porque el regocijo en el Señor debe ser tu fuerza"----*Therefore we rejoice and are glad because these men have "heard" God calling them to ordained service in the Church, and thru their response, we all will be blessed.

And so, let us all prepare ourselves to hear God speak to our hearts in His holy Word, and to make Himself Present with us through the Precious Gift of the Holy Eucharist, by calling to mind our sins.

Homily:

What we have just witnessed is really very powerful. It's much more significant than a "roll-call", like we used to do in school to make sure that everyone was there, and no one was absent. No, it's much more than that. When each name was called, and each man said "Present"/ "**Presente**", he WAS stating that he was here, but he was also saying that he is ready, willing, open, anxious, to "Present" himself, "**Listo para ofrecerse a sí mismo**", for Service to God and to the Church, most particularly to become "Instituted" in the Ministry of Lector.

You are a wonderfully diverse group of men, each of whom, we trust, has been called by God, to do what only each of you in your unique and varied ways is able to do. You have been called from every part of our Diocese, and from different cultures, languages, academic backgrounds, and professions, representing the "catholicity of the Church" and the unique characteristics of our Diocese. And by "presenting" yourselves just a moment ago, you continue to make of yourselves, and your very lives, a "present"/ "un regalo"----an "offering"/ "**un ofrecimiento**"--a "sacrifice"/ "**un sacrificio**" that, as today's Psalm puts it, is "*more precious than gold, than a heap of purest gold*"/ "**que, como dice el Salmo de hoy, es 'más precioso que el oro, que una pila del oro más puro.'**"

My sons in the Lord, I want you to know that God is pleased with your "Presence"; and I am pleased, and we all are blessed, by your generous willingness to make of your lives a "Present"/ "**un Regalo**", of Service to God's Holy People here in our Diocese.

Being "instituted" as a Lector in the Church is much more than a "step along the way"----Candidacy, to Lector, to Acolyte next year, to Ordination which, God willing, you will receive in 2023. Each of these "moments" emphasize what is essential to what it means to be a Deacon. But today, as you have answered "Present", you willingly "Present" yourselves to become Instituted as a Lector, which is the first of the "munera" of Permanent Deacons---the Ministry of the Word.

You are called, not just to read words in Church; you are being "Instituted" as a Lector to read---proclaim----announce----the very Word of God. And as St. Paul said so affectionately to his "spiritual son", Timothy, in today's Second Reading, I also say to each of you: "*Remain faithful to what you have learned AND believed.*"

“Y como San Pablo le dijo tan afectuosamente a su ‘hijo espiritual’, Timoteo, en la segunda lectura de hoy, también les digo a cada uno de ustedes: ‘Permanezcan fieles a lo que han aprendido Y creído.’” And just like Timothy, you too can say that *“from infancy you have known the Sacred Scriptures”*. **Y al igual que Timoteo, ustedes también pueden decir que “desde la infancia han conocido la Sagrada Escritura.”**

That’s extremely important. Anyone can stand in front of people and read words---maybe read them clearly and understandably, even dramatically. BUT, if they are not being read credibly, out of a conviction of Faith, they will have no meaning. So, my dear Sons in the Lord, you must first have a profound love for God’s Word; you must allow God’s Word to guide your life, to comfort you in your sorrows, to encourage you in your times of confusion, to correct you when you are going off track, and to give you hope even when you are unclear about what the future holds. Then, you can credibly proclaim that life-giving and life-saving Word of God to others.

As you will hear shortly, the Instruction for the Rite of Lector very clearly states that before proclaiming God’s Word to others, you first must accept that Word with docility and true openness to the Holy Spirit. And that can only happen by spending time each day, praying and meditating on God’s Word, to help you to deepen your Love for THE WORD made Flesh. It is HE, Jesus, and His Word of Life, Whom you proclaim.

When you stand to read God’s Word, like Ezra whom we heard about in today’s First Reading, who *“read out of the Book of the Law from daybreak until midday”; and read plainly.....**and** interpreted it, so that all could understand what was read”*, you will be doing the same. While I don’t expect that you’ll be called upon to read and preach from “morning till midday”, it is expected that every time you read God’s Word, whether it’s to Proclaim the Gospel at Daily and Sunday Mass, or to offer a brief Reflection, or to give the Homily; whether it’s in the instruction of children, youth and adults in catechetical presentations you’ll be giving; or even in a pastoral conversation you might have with an individual about questions of faith---it is expected that you will “plainly” communicate God’s Word, and “interpret” it in ways that people can understand what God is asking, not your own interpretation.

When Jesus went into His hometown synagogue at the very beginning of His public ministry, as we heard in today's Gospel passage, Jesus, *the Word of God Himself*, was invited to stand up and read the Word from Scripture. St. Luke tells us that He purposely chose the passage from Isaiah the Prophet in which He invoked the Power and Grace of the Holy Spirit---the Giver of Life---to come upon Him, the "*Anointed One*"---the Christ---and to send Him forth to "*bring glad tidings to the poor....and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*" As Jesus said, when He finished -----now this prophecy is fulfilled.

My dear Sons, you too must invoke, and welcome, the Holy Spirit into your lives, and especially now into your Ministry as Lectors. Make sure that you prayerfully prepare each and every time before you begin to publicly read God's Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to also come "upon you"---to "anoint you"---so that you also can proclaim the Word that is filled with such *glad tidings* to all of us who are spiritually poor and in need of God's grace.

You have the special distinction of being Instituted into this Ministry of Lector in this Jubilee Year of our Diocese's 50th Anniversary of establishment, and at the very beginning of this special *Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit* here in our Diocese. This is a special Year of Grace, filled with wonderful possibilities for our Diocese. I believe this can be, and needs to be, a time of Spiritual Renewal for our Local Church, and that begins with each of us spending time in prayer, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide us---to show us the way---to remind us of the Mission of the Church that has been entrusted to us---to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all the people of these 9 counties in southwest Michigan.

God's Word is powerful; it is life-giving; it is life-SAVING, but only if it is proclaimed with joy and courage and conviction. And God's Word, the Good News of Jesus, is for everyone. We can't just restrict our ministry only to those who are coming to our churches to participate in the Mass. As Pope Francis continues to remind us, and challenge us, we must "go to the peripheries", to the "margins", to those places where people who don't know Jesus live and work. The only way we can possibly do that is with the power of the Holy Spirit---the same Spirit who empowered the Apostles on the first Pentecost and sent them forth to all the ends of the earth with that Good News. As newly-instituted Lectors, and all of us priests and deacons and lay faithful----we need to pray for the guidance, the direction, the powerful Gifts of the Holy Spirit---so that, first of all, we can focus on being renewed in our Faith, and then to help us to bring a time of spiritual renewal to our Diocese.

St. Augustine, our Diocesan Patron, experienced his moment of conversion when he heard God's Voice speak to his heart those words that we see here on this very Ambo, "*Tolle lege*"; "*Take and Read*" / "*Tomar y Leer*". While St. Augustine was a learned man, who had read books on every subject, it was only when he read and allowed God's Word to touch his heart, that Augustine finally experienced that true conversion that quieted his "restless heart" by finding his rest, his peace, in God.

My dear Sons in the Lord, as you continue with your formation on the road to the Diaconate, I ask you to embrace, wholeheartedly, this Ministry of Lector which you begin today, and which will be yours for the rest of your life. Please see this ministry as a great privilege but also a powerful responsibility because you will be speaking on God's behalf, and on behalf of the Church. **Mis queridos Hijos en el Señor, mientras continúan con su formación en el camino al Diaconado, les pido que abracen de todo corazón este Ministerio de Lector que hoy inician y que será suyo para el resto de su vida. Consideren este ministerio como un gran privilegio pero también considérenlo como una gran responsabilidad porque ustedes hablarán en nombre de Dios y en nombre de la Iglesia.**

Why? Because: "*Today is holy to the Lord your God....do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength.*"