

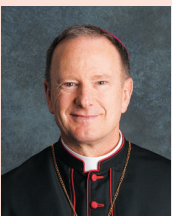


PHOTO BY CHUCK DECKERT

DESCEND TO ASCEND

WHAT ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST TEACHES US

In the Rite of the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Eastern Catholic Church – the Byzantine Rite, the Ukrainian Rite, the Russian and Greek Catholic Rites: After the couple have exchanged vows, the couple join hands, and the priest wraps the ends of his long, elaborate stole over the couple's joined hands, and leads them in a slow walk around the altar. This is done so that their first steps as a married couple are taken around the Table of the Lord.



BY BISHOP MICHAEL
C. BARBER, SJ

Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ has been bishop of the Diocese of Oakland since May 2013.

And so, you, John Paul and Juan Carlos, after you have made your promises to the Lord and been ordained, in your first steps as deacons, I, the bishop, will lead you around the Table of the Poor, to serve the homeless early tomorrow morning.

The Table of the Poor and The Table of the Lord are one. The Lord served the poor by giving the manna in the des-

ert; he fed the 5,000 with the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; and only then did he feed the disciples, and all of us, at the Last Supper and Holy Communion.

Why is it important that you serve the poor tomorrow morning on the first full day of your diaconate? It is to give the words you will later speak from the pulpit credibility.

People came to hear St. John the Baptist not just because he spoke well, but because he lived well.

He lived a life of prayer and penance, self-abnegation. He wore animal skins for clothes, he fasted, and when he ate: he subsisted on a diet of grasshoppers and wild honey. His diet and living situation were more like the homeless people you will see tomorrow than like me

or our brother priests in the rectory life that we enjoy.

Today at Benedictine Solesmes Abbey in France, they serve honey for dessert.

St. John the Baptist lived a life of repentance, obedience and sacrifice.

St. John the Baptist's detachment from luxury and pleasure showed that he lived for God alone.

At the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, over the main entrance, it says *Deus Sola*. God alone.

Because St. John the Baptist lived like this, people listened to his words.

Like they listened to St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. John Vianney ... and all great reformers of the Church. They lived the life. And because they did, people listened to their words.

“
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Like the sons of St. Francis, who came here, to this area in California, in the late 1700s. They preached the Gospel to the Native American Indians. The Indians listened to their words; they watched how the Franciscans lived their way of life and then the Indians here desired to have a Church built for Mass and the sacraments, and the Indians themselves built this Mission Church.

People listened to them like they listened to Mother Teresa. She was invited to speak at Harvard University. She was invited to speak at the Nobel Prize in Norway. She was invited to speak at the United Nations – all because she lived like St. John the Baptist. Her Sisters continue to live that way today. You can see them in their convent in Richmond in our diocese.

I don't expect you to live

like the homeless. But maybe instead of seeking a wealthy, comfortable parish, you can say to the Vicar for Clergy: Send me to the parish no one wants to go to; in the dangerous neighborhood that has bars on the windows and bloodstains on the sidewalk. I'm thinking of St. Mark's in Richmond.

Brothers, if you want to ascend, first descend.

Christ descended to death on a cross, therefore God highly exalted him.

St. John the Baptist descended into the desert, away from all luxury and comfort; descended again into a jail cell, and descended into execution by beheading; and ascended so high, Jesus said of him: There is no man born of woman greater than John the Baptist.

If I may paraphrase Isaiah's first reading and apply it to

you two young men today:

“For now the Lord has spoken, who formed you, John Paul and Juan Carlos, as his servants from your mother's womb, that Jacob may be brought back to Him – that the people of Alameda and Contra Costa counties may be brought back to Him – and Israel gathered to him. That all Catholics who have wandered away may be brought back to Him – so that you can say today, on your ordination day, and every day you wake up hereafter:

“And I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord, and my God is now my strength!”

This is the homily Bishop Barber gave at the ordination of Deacon Juan Carlos Ponce and Deacon John Paul Rabago on June 24 at Mission San José. ●

Table of the Poor – People's Park, Berkeley

At 7 a.m. the day after their ordination, Deacon John Paul Rabago and Deacon Juan Carlos Ponce helped set the Table of the Poor in People's Park in Berkeley. Working alongside volunteers from Berkeley Night on the Streets/Berkeley Catholic Worker, they served fruit and muffins and sandwiches. As he promised, their bishop served with them. After serving there, the table moved to downtown Berkeley, where more people were fed.

PHOTOS BY
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