

Homily
Diaconate Ordination
June 6, 2025

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” Dear brothers and sisters, welcome. This is a joyful and beautiful day for the Church, and I’m happy to see so many who are here to pray and celebrate God’s blessings. We thank Fr. Ackerman and the people of Holy Cross for hosting us this evening. With such a large ordination class, we thought it would be wise to hold this celebration in a larger place, and this new Holy Cross Church is perfect for the occasion. This is the largest ordination class we have seen in the diocese of Fargo for a number of years, so we have many reasons to rejoice.

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” These words of Jesus were spoken to the apostles on the night before he died, and they are just as pertinent today as they were then. The men who stand before us today, your sons, brothers, and friends, have heard the call of God. Through his Church, Jesus Christ has chosen these men to serve his people, and with faith, they have said a confident, resounding “yes.” “Here I am, send me.”

The men before us are called, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, to the order of deacons. And as you may know, the word deacon means “servant.” In a particular way, they will be of service to the Church, just as the seven men chosen by the apostles were called to serve those most in need. In a particular way, they will serve by proclaiming the Gospel, the good news of our salvation. They will baptize and welcome souls into the family of God as his adopted children. They will serve with the priest at the altar and distribute the Holy Eucharist to the faithful. And they will attend to the sick and the dying, especially once again with the Holy Eucharist in Viaticum. In all these ways, they will show themselves to be servants after the heart of Christ, who said, “I have come not to be served, but to serve.”

Dear sons, as you present yourselves for ordination today, I urge you to unite yourself fully to Christ, who gave us an example of service when he washed the feet of his own disciples. And always remember that Jesus exercised his greatest service in his sacrifice upon the cross. Just as he gave his life unreservedly, so you are called to offer your life for the sake of God’s Kingdom. You will make a promise of obedience to the bishop, not to be servile but to be entirely free for service in the Church. Once again, you will be conforming yourself in this way to Christ himself, who said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will, but your will be done.” You will promise to live in the celibate state, once again in union with Jesus and as a sign of your total gift of self to God. The world is puzzled by these commitments, and may think them strange. But in the light of faith, they are manifestations of your love, your desire to give your all, and to be entirely one with our Lord.

Of course, we do not take up these commitments on our own, but only with the help of God’s grace, who first called us to receive his love. Lean always on that grace, especially through your prayer and your communion with Christ in the Eucharist. Be men of prayer, not only for yourself, but for the Church that you serve, the Church that you love, the Church that is the Body of Christ. By your prayer every day, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Mass, lift up

to God the people whom you serve, and be present to them in body and in spirit, a witness to the hope that is within you.

You are being ordained in a very special year of grace, this Jubilee Year that is focused on hope. You, my sons, are a sign of hope for the entire Church, which rejoices in the call that you have received. As St. Paul tells us, hope does not disappoint when its foundation is Christ. May your diaconal ministry be an occasion of hope for those who hear you preach, for those who receive the Body and Blood of Christ from your hands, for those whom you serve in their spiritual or material need. And may your own hope be always founded on Christ himself, who called you to himself in this sacramental way, and who sends you as his servants into the world.

Your diaconal ordination is called transitional, because this is a further milestone on your journey towards the priesthood. With the help of God, we all pray that a year from now you will stand before the bishop and the Church once again, ready to receive priestly ordination. But already, as you take up the office of deacon, along with the holy deacons who went before you – St. Stephen, St. Lawrence, St. Francis, and many others – you will be a co-worker with our Lord in the vineyard, sent as an agent of love and service into a world that can at times be uncaring and rather indifferent. Look for Christ in your brothers and sisters. Allow Christ to act through you, and let your diaconal ministry always be directed to building up his Kingdom. And then, on the last day when you go out to meet the Lord, you will be able to hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.”