

## **You are to be raised to the Order of the Diaconate**

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

December 15, 2018

Diaconate Ordination  
St. Mary's Cathedral, Fargo

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is a joyful day for the Diocese of Fargo, and certainly for all of us here. I greet my brother priests, and especially those who have come from St. Paul Seminary as Eric's formators. I also greet our dear deacons and our seminarians, who already have given themselves to the service of Christ and his Church. And I greet all here who have come to celebrate with Eric, especially his family and friends, and fellow parishioners. This man, your relative and friend, is now to be ordained to the Order of Deacons, so it is fitting that we should reflect on this calling, this order in the Church to which he is about to be raised.

Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will assist the Bishop and the priests in the ministry of the word, of the altar, and of charity. And in all things, he must be a servant to all. In a short time, he will prostrate himself before the altar as a sign of his dying to self. Like the grain of wheat, he will fall to the earth and die, but then rise to bear much fruit. He will be consecrated by the laying on of hands that comes down to us from the Apostles, and in this way he will be bound to the Bishop and the priests in service to the Church. And with the help of God, he is to carry out his service in such a way that you will recognize him as a true disciple of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve.

Now, dear son, you are to be raised to the Order of the Diaconate. In fact, the very word *diakonia* means service. The Lord has given you an example that just as he himself has done, you also should do. As a deacon, you must open your heart to God so you might serve his people with love and with joy. Since no one can serve two masters, turn away from all defilement, all avarice, all self-serving, and give yourself generously to the One who has called you. Following the example of Jesus himself, you will carry out your ministry in the celibate state. By this commitment, you offer yourself wholly and entirely to our Lord, in body, mind, and spirit. In the midst of these challenging times, this commitment is more important than ever: a sign of self-giving love and a source of fruitfulness in the Church. Turn always to our Lord to sustain you as you make this gift of self to the One who calls you to his service.

The ministry of the word, now entrusted to you, includes proclaiming the Gospel, preaching the homily, and offering instruction in the faith of the Church, formally but also informally. Your formation has prepared you well for this ministry of the Word, but it doesn't stop there. Being a faithful minister of the Word requires a lifetime of prayer, reflection, and study. Your formation in the Word of God must continue, so that your proclamation of the One who is the "Word made flesh" will be ever new. In his exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis speaks of this ministry of the Word, and urges us above all to be friends of Jesus. If our friendship with Christ is personal and authentic, then our proclamation of his word, our teaching and preaching, will truly reach the hearts of our listeners. We will not only speak the Word of God, but we will become its witnesses. Friends of Christ, witnesses of his word, are able to light a path of discipleship for those who hear him. They make it possible to worship him in spirit and in truth. They move the hearts of believers to deeper faith and to greater love for their neighbors.

You are also called to service at the altar and to the sacramental life of the Church. You will assist in the Church's Eucharistic liturgy, preparing the altar and distributing the Body and Blood of Christ. You will baptize, you will bring Viaticum to the dying, you will preside at weddings and funerals. In this way too you will be a servant of God's people, not calling attention to yourself, but always leading others to Christ. In the liturgy, and especially at the Eucharist, we enter into the mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus. As a deacon, you will welcome others into these mysteries, which communicate the life and love of Christ to his people. Nourished by the grace of God in the sacraments, we can then become the

missionary disciples that Jesus calls us to be, ready to go out and share with others the gift of faith that we have received.

And finally, you are called to the ministry of charity, which is described so vividly in the Acts of the Apostles as waiting on tables. Your role at the heavenly table prepares you to set an earthly table for those in need. Charity is not just an appendage to your ministry as a deacon, but is really at the heart of your ministry. In your service to others, especially the poor, you show yourself to be like Christ, a servant to all. Remember that he told us, whatever we do for the least ones, we do for him. When we recognize the face of Jesus in our brothers and sisters, we abide more fully in him. Jesus is with us in them, especially those in need, and now you are called to serve him in a special way, drawing others into that same charity, a charity that evangelizes, that proclaims God's love and truth.

My son, be like those men chosen by the Apostles for the work of charity, men of good reputation, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Be always firmly rooted and grounded in faith, chaste and beyond reproach before God and your neighbor. You are, after all, a minister of Christ, a steward of the mysteries of God. Remain always in the hope that is offered by the Gospel, for you are no longer only a hearer of the Gospel but also its minister. Let your life proclaim the truth that you preach, so that 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."