

Maundy Thursday
Chrism Mass/Renewal of Ordination Vows
April 21, 2011

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Our Lord Jesus Christ says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

These are powerful words to hear on this day as we prepare to join our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane tonight in prayer. These words are inspiring to hear today as we see tomorrow coming with the cross of pain and shame Jesus bears for us. When we hear these words today, we know some of the consequences of putting those words into action for ourselves and our people.

My brothers in Christ, we come before the cross of Christ this morning to renew the sacred vows we each have made to Christ and his Church. The ordination vows all priests and bishops share is the first ordination we experienced as deacons. Ordinations to the priesthood or the episcopate must always be rooted in the vows we took as deacons, as servants of all in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

As deacons we commit our lives to learning the vital lessons of what it means to serve God's people regardless of social status or influence. As deacons we take upon our own hearts the needs of others as our own.

In the letter of James we are reminded again of how important prayer is for us and for our people. We must, as deacons, priests and as your bishop, we must be deeply committed to prayer with our people. Your example and my example in prayer in person with our people in pain, in sickness, in confession for sin and in confusion "is powerful and effective".

Prayer provides us encouragement and hope as we spend time with our Lord and our people who need our example and the comfort we provide in the name of Christ. To be in touch with the needs of the faithful who look to us for the compassion and love of Christ is the commitment you and I made in our ordination as deacons.

God-willing this commitment strengthens as we become priests of the Church for which our Lord gave his life. As deacons we learn that to serve the least of those around us is to serve Christ himself, then as priests we accept the responsibility of leadership of the people God has called us to serve.

Servant leadership is the foundation of our ordinations. As leaders of your congregations, and as your bishop, we learn the importance of proclaiming good news to our people. The good news of our Lord and Saviour is not to be kept hidden, but shared in our preaching, in our teaching and in the example of our lives for our people.

Let us be truthful. Our people look to each one of us as examples of what a righteous and holy life looks like. If they do not see this Christian life in us, where will they look?

The ordinations we have accepted to serve and to lead are not ceremonial or for social status. These ordinations are public vows to follow Jesus Christ whose life of sacrificial love did not end on the cross of shame, but found fulfilment in the empty tomb.

On this day, Maundy Thursday, you and I renew the vows which shape our lives as deacons, as priests and as your bishop. We renew our vows on a day named for the mandatum, the command of Christ himself "to love another as I have loved you". These simple words change our lives every day as we bring those words into reality for our people. Love must be at the heart of the servant of Christ. Love must be at the heart of any deacon, priest or bishop.

With that love of Christ in our hearts, grafted onto our souls, on our lips and guiding our lives, let us renew our commitment to our Lord and Saviour. The same Lord who announced to all with ears to hear: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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