

Sacrofano, 19 February 2025

Dear friends,

Today we gather in this time of grace of the Jubilee to celebrate and praise God for our service to the Church and the world.

The diaconate is a precious gift, a vocation that expresses the deepest dimension of following Christ: humble, faithful and joyful service. The Holy Year gives us the grace to bring together the diaconal realities, in order to recognise ourselves as pilgrims and witnesses of hope and communion, in the horizon of synodality and missionary spirit, as the conference of the Dicastery that we will experience on Saturday morning in Rome will remind us.

Because this is precisely the key to understanding the foundation of your vocation and, therefore, your mission.

The deacon: servant of forgiveness and hope

First of all, forgiveness. Forgiveness as such, with the salvation it brings, necessarily refers to the mission of the Church in its most authentically synodal dimension. It is its foundation and glue. The basis and cement of every authentic communion. A world without forgiveness, and in particular without forgiveness of enemies, is a world without hope, without future, without salvation. Hope and forgiveness are the essential conditions for every change of life, every conversion and therefore every salvation. Bringing hope means generating future and faith in a world where mistakes are understood, forgiven and remedied in order to learn to live together, day after day, in the light of Christ's love.

This "Servant," who pitched his tent among us (Jn 1:14; Rev 21:3), achieved this condition by "emptying himself" (Phil 2:7). The words that best express its meaning are found in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you

through his poverty might become rich" (8:9).

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us: "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). These words resonate with particular force in the heart of every deacon, called to be a living sign of Christ the servant in the world. The service of the deacon is not an accessory function, but a concrete witness to the very mystery of God, who bends down to humanity to heal, lift up, nourish and comfort. Here, then, is the foundation of your vocation, the love of Christ, which translates into your daily reality as the "Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life" (cf. Mk 10:45).

The deacon is a living sign of Christ the servant, not merely a collaborator with the priest, but a minister ordained to live, promote and animate service in the Christian community, rooted in the ecclesial mission that takes him to the existential peripheries, among the poor, the sick, the suffering, that is, among those who most need a presence of charity.

Builders of communion and servants of hope

In a world marked by divisions, loneliness and closure, the deacon is called to be a builder of communion. In his mission, he helps the Church to be ever more "Church in going forth", close to the least and capable of welcoming everyone. When St. Lawrence, Roman deacon and martyr, was asked to hand over the treasures of the Church, he pointed to the poor and said: "Here are our treasures!" . This reminds us that the true wealth of the Church is those whom the world often discards, but whom God loves with a special love.

The theme of the Jubilee is "Pilgrims of Hope." This challenges us deeply. The deacon is called to be a servant of hope, one who brings the light of Christ into situations of darkness, who offers a word of comfort to those in pain, who proclaims the Gospel of mercy with his life. We think of the many deacons engaged in serving the poor, prisoners, the sick, migrants, supporting and animating the charitable actions of Christians so that the gift of self of every baptised person may be

perfumed with the love of Christ the servant.

The ministry of deacons is a bridge between the altar and the street, between the Eucharist and the concrete life of people, helping every disciple of Jesus to make baptismal diakonia alive and concrete. This is the heart of the diaconate: to make charity a liturgy and liturgy a service of charity.

Serve with humility and joy

Dear brother deacons, our ministry asks us to live our service with humility and deep joy. The world needs to see Christians who serve with a smile, without complaining, without seeking recognition, but simply because we belong to Christ. In this Holy Year, we are invited to renew our "yes" to the Lord, with the awareness that true greatness lies in serving, that true joy comes from giving oneself. This is why no deacon takes anything away from other ministers, takes nothing away from any parish priest, and certainly not from any bishop who has placed him close to him, but "should rather be considered as an expression of a Church committed to growing in the service of the Kingdom by valuing all degrees of ordained ministry." We firmly believe that the acceptance and appreciation of the diaconate in every local Church can make a significant contribution to countering the disease of clericalism, which wounds the Christian community and spreads easily whenever one of its ministers thinks of himself as separate from the other vocations that constitute it. Relations between priests and deacons, as members of the same sacrament of Holy Orders recognised in their diversity, will certainly enhance the healthy dynamics of reciprocity and co-responsibility for an authentically synodal Church.

It is a joy for me to have here before me brothers, men, husbands, fathers who have decided to give themselves to their families and communities, not seeking to "earn more and more," but extending their families to the whole reality in which they live, offering themselves as builders of hope for a future of communion. And to you, the wives here present, and to all the wives of deacons, I extend my

fraternal thanks, because the diaconate of your husbands would not be possible or complete without the full participation of you, their wives, in their ministry, and because the sacrament of marriage, for married deacons, is the root and foundation of their gift of self. The witness of every diaconal couple is in itself a prophecy and a sign of hope in this world sick with individualism and loneliness.

What could be a more perfect embodiment of an 'outgoing' and synodal Church: a member of the ordained ministry who comes from society to remain in society! How significant is the presence of ministers of the Church in the world of work and in the areas where the culture of peoples is shaped! This aspect alone could perhaps explain many of the problems that the diaconate has had in being fully readmitted to the life of the Church. The Council of Trent already called for its restoration as a permanent degree of the ministry of Holy Orders, and yet it was not until the Second Vatican Council that its full rehabilitation began. The last session of the Synod of Bishops affirms and recognises the diaconate as "a valuable factor in the maturation" of the Church. The international meeting on Saturday morning on the theme "Deacons in a Synodal and Missionary Church: to be witnesses of hope" is a step in this direction. It represents a further step forward and the beginning of a process that aims to increasingly value and rediscover the preciousness and centrality of the diaconal ministry, a service to hope and of hope for the future of the Church.

Dear brothers, let us entrust our ministry to the Virgin Mary, faithful servant of the Lord, and to Saint Lawrence, patron saint of deacons, that they may help us to live our service with hearts burning with love. Let us look in a special way to Mary, Mother of Hope and Woman of Service, who knows well what it means to offer and to suffer on this earth, so that to this earth and on this earth you may add, day after day, a little more of Heaven, of hope, of future. Thank you for your ever more necessary service: may it be humble, faithful and joyful!