

## **Little things can test faith, hope and courage**

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A few years ago – well, many years ago -- the Secretariat of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate published a quarterly journal called ***Diaconal Quarterly***. At one time, the publication had a series of front covers featuring ink drawings by Thomas Loya of a number of outstanding deacons in the Church: St. Stephen – Protomartyr, or the first martyr; St. Lawrence, a deacon of Rome and martyr; St. Ephrem, mystic, homilist, polemicist and hymnist, and St. Francis of Assisi, mystic, founder, teacher, evangelist.

The first two were martyrs who died for the Faith, and the second two were deacons who did not seek to become priests.

What brings all of this to mind was our recent celebration of the Feast of St. Lawrence Aug. 10. In many ways, Lawrence, one of the seven deacons of Rome during the pontificate of Pope Sixtus in 257-258, was a model of extraordinary courage, outstanding perspicacity and irrepressible humor.

As the story goes, Sixtus was elected pope and selected Lawrence as one of his deacons, making him archdeacon, or first among the seven, and making him treasurer, chief accountant, keeper of the keys and dispenser of food and money to the poor. At the same time, the Roman emperor, Valerian, decided he would get rid of those pesky Christians by eliminating their leaders, so he issued an edict declaring that all bishops, priest and deacons should be put to death and their goods confiscated.

One of the first victims was Pope Sixtus and, it is said, as he was being taken away he told Lawrence to sell everything that the Church possessed and give the money as alms to the poor. As St. Ambrose told the story a century later, the prefect of Rome called Lawrence before him and demanded that he turn over the treasury of the Church.

Lawrence asked for some time to gather it together and make an inventory.

Several days later, when he was called to appear before the prefect, he showed up, not with wagon-loads of gold and silver but a crowd of Rome's beggars following him. "Behold the treasures of the Church," he said, gesturing to the crowd.

The prefect was not pleased.

He ordered that Lawrence be seized and put to death with a particularly gruesome torture, ordering that he be roasted alive over a slow fire.

Stretched out on a gridiron over the fire, there came a point when Lawrence began to poke fun at his tormenter and declared, "Let my body be turned, one side is broiled enough." Once he was turned, he derided his executioner again saying, "It is cooked enough, you may eat."

As he died, the last words of Deacon Lawrence were a prayer for the conversion of Rome.

Lawrence made that supreme sacrifice of his own life in witness to his Christian Faith. Maybe we aren't called to make that one act of undaunted faith, invincible hope and superhuman courage, but day by day or week by week we may find ourselves subjected to little acts of martyrdom that test our faith, hope, love and courage as Christians.

Let Lawrence, archdeacon for Pope Sixtus and our brother in the Order of Deacon, be for us a model of courage, right judgment and good humor.

In a final, grisly touch of irony, it must be noted that St. Lawrence is the patron and protector of cooks.