

You are a herald of Christ

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***“Receive the Gospel of Christ,
whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read,
teach what you believe,
and practice what you teach.”***

These euphonious, almost poetic, words are unforgettably written in the heart and mind of every deacon from the day of his Ordination. Newly ordained, vested in stole and dalmatic, he knelt again before the bishop, who entrusted to him the Book of the Gospels and proclaimed the memorable words of the Deacon's Commission.

The words themselves tell us who we are, what we do and how we are to live. As a “herald” of the Gospel of Christ, the deacon proclaims the Good News to the world that Christ has died but has been raised and will come again in glory, but as a herald he is also called to be a sign of what is yet to come.

Far from coming to an end on Ordination Day, the deacon's formation continues as he immerses himself in the Word of God entrusted to his care. Ever-challenging and ever-fresh, the words of Scripture inexorably draw us into the wonder and mystery of God's self-revelation, into the awesome beauty of God's will and plan, and into the marvelous truth of God's love and mercy.

Gifted with faith in God and in Jesus, His Son, a faith that has been handed on to us through the Apostles and their successors, with lives permeated with God's Truth, and hearts shaped by the sacred dower of Jesus' Paschal Mystery, the deacon stands to proclaim the mysteries of our faith to seekers and students, to parents and children, to the beloved and the bereaved, to all who yearn for the truth of Jesus Christ.

More than anything, more than herald, more than teacher, the deacon is called to be a man of Christ, a living icon of Christ the Servant. Imbued with the Gospel and formed by his faith, the deacon must be seen as the living Gospel. Our brother deacon, St. Francis of Assisi, it is said, once sent out some of his confreres to take the Gospel to the city streets and the country byways. Sending them on their way, he said, “Preach the Gospel wherever you go, use words if you must.”

Preaching during Vespers in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris last September, Pope Benedict XVI referred to his “dear deacons” and said:

“Effective co-workers of the bishops and priests, continue to love the word of God! You proclaim the Gospel at the heart of the Eucharistic Celebration, and you expound it in the catechesis you offer to your brothers and sisters. Make the Gospel the center of your lives, of your service to your neighbors, of your entire diakonia.

“Without seeking to take the place of priests, but assisting them with your friendship and your activity, may you be living witnesses to the infinite power of God’s Word.”

Let there be no doubt about it, brothers: There are no part-time deacons!