Jesus, while speaking to the Father, looked at his disciples: “I pray for them,” he said. (John 16). Jesus prayed for those he loved.

New deacons: Will you do that? Will you pray for those you love?

In a few minutes, according to the ritual, I will ask you in front of all these folks:

“You resolve to maintain and deepen the spirit of prayer that is proper to your way of life and, in keeping with this spirit and what is required of you, to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the People of God and indeed for the whole world?”

You will be asked to respond, “I do.” I ask you to live out that promise, just like a bride and groom at their wedding say to each other, “I do.”

I ask you, the Church asks you, to do what Jesus did: “To pray for those you love.” And a deacon of the Church is asked to love all of God’s people.

Tomorrow morning, I've invited the new deacons to join me in serving breakfast to the homeless at People’s Park in Berkeley. We join the Night on the Streets Catholic Worker Movement, led by J.C. Orton, who have been doing this every Sunday for 20 years.

I do this so that you will remember the origins of the deaconate. In the New Testament the Apostles -- who were bishops -- were doing just this: serving food to the poor, but it took so much time that they could not prepare their homilies or celebrate the sacraments. So they decided to choose worthy men and ordain them as deacons to carry out the “corporal works of mercy.”

I wanted your first public act as a deacon to be this serving of the poor -- and not just serving at the altar, although the liturgy is a very worthy and important part of your ministry.

But will this serving the poor actually be your first act as a deacon? Upon further reflection, no. It will be when you take up your breviary, which contains the Liturgy of the Hours, the Divine Office, and pray your Midday Prayer and your Evening Prayer later today. At that moment it won’t just be Huong Dinh and Candelario Jimenez praying their personal devotions, you will be praying as ordained ministers of the Church, praying the Official Prayer of the Church, not just for yourself, but for the “People of God and for the whole world” -- as it says in the ritual. And so you will pray for your family and friends, your parishioners, religious sisters, your brother priests, deacons and bishop.
But also your vision and your heart must extend beyond your family and parish: Pray for the homeless you will meet tomorrow; pray for those who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which anniversary was last week; in all of World War II. Pray for those poor souls who died in the bomb blast in Beirut; those who are suffering from COVID, including our three priests and deacon who are infected.

Pray for those who will beg you, because you are an ordained minister of the church, to pray for them. “Deacon: pray for me. Pray for my son. Pray we’ll find a job. Pray for my kid who is addicted to drugs. Pray for my husband’s alcoholism” ... hundreds of petitions. That’s why we take up our breviary and pray morning and evening --because we love our people, and we have promised to pray for them.

This duty, “a duty of love,” will last your whole life. Father Paul Schmidt, our former vicar for priests, suffered open-heart surgery a couple of years ago. The next day I went to visit the hospital, and found him sitting up in bed, with his well-worn breviary in hand. A seminary classmate of mine, Father Bob Spitzer, SJ, who is now blind, has memorized one of the daily Offices and prays it over again every day.

Pray for those you love. Love those for whom you pray. Open your heart to the whole world.

And do that for the rest of your life. That is what Christ is asking of you today.

*Photo credit Dominique Ghekiere-Mintz/Special to The Catholic Voice*