

Homily Notes for Sunday, May 10, 2020, 5th Easter, A

Readings: Acts 6:1-7, I Pt 2:4-9, Jn 14:1-12

1. Summary: On this Mothers' Day our readings show appreciation for ministry and the assurance of salvation which gives us courage as both men and women to risk ourselves in service.

2. We first wish to express appreciation to all mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, and others who have cared for us as mothers. **Then**, reflecting upon the first reading and the formation of deacons, let us reflect on the ordering of ministry. **Finally**, inspired by Jesus's words in the Gospel, let us appreciate our calling to heaven to eternal life which gives us courage and motivation to serve by risking ourselves and sacrificing ourselves for the good of others.

3. Let us offer this Mass on Mother's Day in thanksgiving for all our mothers, whether they are alive or have gone to their eternal reward. I invite all of us to remember for a moment our mothers or those who have been like mothers to us. How deep and how steadfast is a mother's love for her children and her family. How many ways have our mothers given us what they wanted, given up their comfort or rest in order to serve others?

4. 1st Reading. The Ministry of Service. Let us notice that the decision to establish the order of deacons came about because of a complaint that the widows of the Greek speaking Jews were being neglected. Often is it not that a widow is the most vulnerable and needy of all wives and husbands? How often has a woman committed herself completely to the care of her husband and children to the neglect of her education and her professional capability? Sometimes when her husband dies, she is left without any support. Often today there are divorces in which men abandon their wives and their children and leave them without support. This was the situation in the early church, and they needed to take care of such women. Are we willing to do what is necessary today to care for our women and our families when there is serious need? Also notice that the community chose seven men with Greek names in order to make sure the distribution was fair. The complaint came from the Greek speaking group, so Greek speaking deacons they got!

5. Think with me about the role of leadership here. The Twelve called the community together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the Word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the Ministry of the Word."

6. This raises several issues. First of all, what are your expectations of me as your Pastor? My primary job: "Is the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments and the government of the People of God. Any other commitment they (pastors) take on should be compatible with their pastoral work and supportive of it"... "As pastors we have been chosen... to proclaim with authority the Word of God, to assemble the scattered people of God, to nourish this people on the road to salvation, to maintain it in that unity of which we are, at different levels, active and living instruments, and increasingly to keep this community gathered around Christ faithful to its deepest vocation" (Paull VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 68, Navarre Study Bible, p. 82). Is this what you expect of your Pastor? Yet I am responsible to see that everything gets cared for!

7. Then concerning the Deacon.

"The Second Vatican Council teaches that 'at a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry. For strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the people of god, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity. It pertains to the office of a deacon, in so far as it may be assigned to him by the competent authority, to administer Baptism solemnly, to be custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, in the name of the Church to assist at and to bless marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct

and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and the prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services” (Lumen gentium, 29).

O my goodness! Poor Deacon John! Do you think that both the Pastor and the Deacon need help in their work? Let us not forget that the first deacon, Stephen, was not martyred for his help to widows but for preaching the Gospel! But, in general, this is why we need to work together supportively in our local Church under the leadership of your pastor and deacon. This is why the stewardship program that we are implementing, with nearly forty different ministry groups needs your attention and your support.

8. Our situation with both an English and a Spanish language group is more difficult, but it is exactly the same as the early church where they had Aramaic and Greek speaking groups!

9. Furthermore, I am concerned for your youth and their little children that we carry out all these aspects of ministry well. Especially, today, on Mothers’ Day, I am concerned about our ministry to families. I am concerned that we have entire teams to do marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, resources on the raising of children and prudent management of money, purchases and saving.

Example from my work at the Savings and Loan Coop in the barrio, Las Minas de Baruta in Venezuela. They said that these people were too poor to save, yet in five years we had \$1M in capital managed by members of the Barrio with assistance from the Jesuits of Venezuela!

Concern for 50% of the population that at the coronavirus shutdown had less than \$400 in cash available. How important the disciplines of Christian financial planning! How important the teachings of Dave Ramsey!

10. Now, a major concern is candidates for priests and deacons. Soon we will have a new class for Deacon training. Who might we have on both the English speaking and on the Spanish speaking sides of our congregation to be eligible for these offices? Who would have the courage to take these up? The life of a celibate priest is challenging but the most important work you can carry out in a society! The life of a married deacon, who has to support his family with outside work and then carry out his diaconal functions on top of that is really hard, really challenging.

11. The Gospel reading helps us with confidence and motivation for this work, either as lay members of the Church or as ordained priests and deacons. Jesus says,

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.”

12. We know that if we are faithful to Jesus, he will be faithful to us. This means that we can be motivated to care for others, even at the risk of ourselves. We can care for our mothers. We can care for our wives. We can care for our families. We can care for those around us, even if they have COVID-19 because we know that we have a home in heaven, if we are faithful in our care and service.

13. This is what made the early Church grow. It is reported in a recent book, “The Rise of Christianity: how the obscure, marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the Western World in a few centuries.” It was by their sacrificial love for others. For example, just about the time of Constantine, 320 A.D., there was a plague in Rome. Many were dying. The rich and the powerful fled the city and the plague to the mountains. It was the Christians who stayed and cared for the poor and the sick, and frequently died with them. That got everyone’s attention. It was that sacrificial risking of love for others that was so compelling.

14. Can we be like that? Are we willing to love in our families and in our society with that sacrificial love that risks everything, that gives everything, that cares for God’s people no matter the cost? Or are we going to be typical American consumers and spectators, protecting ourselves and fearing the threats of the outside world? Let us be like the early Christians!