

Explore the Diaconate - The Servant Heart of Christ Made Flesh

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In March of 1962, nine foot tall aliens landed on earth and approached the United Nations. They offered their advanced technology to end many of mankind's miseries such as hunger, energy shortages and nuclear proliferation. Most all of humanity embraced their offer. They made deserts bloom, the hungry were fed, and U.S. code breakers deciphered the title of one of the alien's books, *To Serve Man*.

Everything seemed bright for humanity as the 89th episode of CBS television's *The Twilight Zone* progressed. Many people signed up for trips to the alien's home planet, including one of the show's stars.

But as he stepped on to the alien ship, his coworker who had just translated the remainder of the book cried out, "...don't get on that ship! The rest of the book, *To Serve Man*, it's... it's a cookbook!"

Based upon a 1950 short story by Damon Knight, the shock ending of this TV show always stuck with me. It's fascinating how this sci-fi tale inverts Christ's mission on earth. After all, our Lord and Savior, the great God of the universe, choose to become our food - food that brings us eternal happiness. Plus, He did this by humbling Himself, taking on the flesh and suffering of mankind - not only to serve man, but to sacrifice for us as well.

Sacrifice and service, these two essences of Christ's human nature are sacramentalized in our priests and deacons today. Our beloved priests make present the sacrificial heart of Jesus, while deacons embody His servant heart.

Through ordination to the priesthood, a man's soul is imprinted with the character and united to the sacrificial heart of Christ. In this, he is called to live out Christ's sacrificial love through the grace of Holy Orders. Not only by offering the sacrifice of the Mass in persona Christi capitis, but also by means of the total gift of himself to God and humanity through the love of Christ.

However, a man is not simply ordained first to the priesthood. Rather, he is first ordained to the transitional diaconate. That is, before being configured to the sacrificial heart of our Lord, his soul is constituted to the servant heart of Christ – the diakonia of the one who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45). He does not lose this servant character upon priestly ordination. Rather, it becomes the foundation of his sacrificial ministry.

As James Keating put it, “There can be no sacrifice (priesthood) without service (diaconate). It was only through Christ's service... that sacrifice became his established priestly identity upon Calvary.”

In contrast, some men are called, not to the priesthood, but to live out in an exclusive way the servant heart of Christ. These are our permanent deacons. Men who (through the grace of Holy Orders) open themselves fully and uniquely to Christ the servant. In so doing they are strengthened to act in persona Christi servi, becoming the deacon Jesus - servants to humanity. They become Christ to others just as Jesus described His own presence when He said, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk 22:27).

Maybe you are a man (or know a man) who is naturally drawn to serve in such a unique ministry. If so, it could be a call to consider the permanent diaconate. That special and humble ministry, which allows one to serve at the altar and become permeated by the Word. Then so nourished, go out as Christ the servant in the everyday world.

It is a ministry only made possible through the gift of Holy Orders, wherein the deacon is configured to "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" in a very remarkable way. As Keating writes, "Christ opens his heart to press its servant mysteries into the heart of the deacon, imbuing the man with a defining sacramental character."

I cannot encourage you enough to explore the possibility that Jesus wants this for you, or a man you know. The Diocese is preparing to form another class of men for ordination to the permanent diaconate. Initial applications are due May 1, 2016 and the program begins September 10, 2016 in Casper.

Come to one of the Inquiry sessions to be held around the State this winter and learn more (see ad). Check out the information posted on the Diocesan website under the Vocations tab; or simply call Deacon Joe Sandrini, Director of Diaconal Formation, to learn more about the permanent diaconate and the formation program at 307-275-0641 or e-mail jsandrini@dioceseofcheyenne.org