

# **Deacon must prioritize his life**

## **Married deacon must put his marriage first**

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After the bishop's homily, the candidate makes personal commitments of fidelity, for ordination (like Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage) is an act that looks to the future. The solemn pledges made on the day the sacrament is received are to shape the course of the candidate's life, day by day.

How can one make a lifetime commitment, given that so many circumstances of life change as years go by? A fear of making such commitments is one powerful reason why people are hesitant to step forward for ordination, or for religious profession of the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

For that matter, such fear can inhibit people from entering Christian marriage. People are afraid that they will fail to be faithful for a whole lifetime. But a lifelong commitment is not only possible, but profoundly important if a person is to live to the full, going beyond the demands of the moment. It cannot depend upon a knowledge of what will happen on the path ahead, for no one can see the future. We cannot wait for the false security of such knowledge, or no one could ever make a life-giving permanent commitment.

But what we do know is that whatever the future holds, God is with us each day to help us to be faithful to the great pledges and covenants that give life meaning. And we need only respond to that daily grace by daily renewing the commitment made when the sacrament was received. A person contemplating a lifelong commitment should not be frightened at the prospect of being faithful for life, but be invigorated at the prospect of being faithful for one day, and with God's certain help doing that every day until death.

It is at this point in the ordination that candidate for the permanent diaconate who is not married, and one who is receiving the diaconate as a preparation for the priesthood, makes the commitment to consecrated virginity for the sake of the kingdom of God, promising to live in the celibate state. The bishop says: "By living in this state with total dedication, moved by a sincere love for Christ the Lord, you are consecrated to him in a new and special way."

The candidate for the permanent diaconate who is married will find in his marriage commitment the sign of his primary vocation. In fact, in ordering the priorities of his life, he must always put the diaconal ministry third, after his commitment to his wife and family, and to his job. Only after the demands of those commitments have been fully satisfied is he to devote himself to the demands of the ministry of deacon. The married deacon will act in partnership with his wife, who supports his diaconal ministry. He will need to accommodate within his life two great and absorbing vocations, marriage and ordination.

The candidate is then questioned concerning his willingness to be faithful to the mission of a deacon, and concludes by promising respect and obedience to the bishop. This is a further reminder that ordained ministry is not for personal gain or prestige, but for the service of the common good. The deacon, like the priest, and like the bishop, for that matter, must be ready to serve where he is sent, wherever the need is greatest.

In practice, however, in recognition of the needs of his family, the married deacon will not be freely moved from place to place like a priest in response to pastoral need, but will mainly serve in his own parish.

As also in the ordination of a priest or bishop, as the moment of ordination draws near the candidate lies flat on the ground, and the whole congregation prays the Litany of the Saints,

asking all of the heavenly host to pray that this person serve worthily. This dramatic gesture is a clear reminder of the unworthiness of anyone for ordination, and of the repentant spirit required of a person who is ordained.