

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Diaconate Ordination for Mike Elias and Michael Kieler
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
August 15, 2020

We rejoice in the Lord today, first of all, because we celebrate a feast day in honor of the Virgin Mary, for whose Assumption the Angels rejoice and praise the Son of God.

Mary's Assumption is the completion of her journey. It is also the anticipation of ours as we journey in hope, as so well stated in the preface for today: "her Assumption is the beginning and image of your Church coming to perfection which is...to be with the Lord in glory for all eternity."

This feast indeed "whets" our appetite for our true home – our happy destiny. We believe in eternal life, and we hope to be with the Lord forever! This is the great victory of our faith. We rejoice today for our brothers' reception of holy orders: the ancient order of the diaconate. Mike and Mike, you will not be permanent deacons, but you certainly will be deacons permanently!

By the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be configured into Christ, the servant who showed the way to the point of giving his life for others. Mary "set out and traveled to the hill country in haste," Scripture tells us, her haste is a sign of her readiness to care for Elizabeth and her child joyfully. Mary celebrates God's favor to her as "his lowly servant." She is a humble servant who serves with readiness and joy.

Today is a happy day for the diocese and for the Cathedral, which is at its best for the conferral of holy orders. The renewal of Vatican II has made visible the active visibility of deacons serving in our parishes, thus revealing the unique and proper care rooted in Apostolic times. As the text of the Theological Pontifical Commission on the Diaconate states (2002): Through the incarnation, the *Kyrios*, Lord, becomes the *diakonos*, servant, of all. The Lord God comes out to meet us in his Servant Jesus Christ, the only Son of God (Rom 1:3), who, being in the "form of God," "did not see in the form of God a prize to be coveted, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. Having become like men ...he abased himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:6-8)

Being a Christian means following Christ's example in putting oneself at the service of others to the point of self-renunciation and self-giving, for love.

Baptism confers this *diakonein* power of service on every Christian. Through it, by participation in the service, worship and witness of the church, Christians cooperate in Christ's diakonia for the salvation of mankind. As members of the Body of Christ, all should become servants of one another, using the charisms which they have received for the building up of the Church and their brethren in faith and love.

Because he was the *doulos*, or slave, carrying out the Father's saving will in total obedience, Jesus Christ was made Lord of all creation. "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to

serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:45) In the same way, Jesus instituted the Twelve “to be his companions, and sent them out to preach, giving them the power to cast out demons.” (Mk 3:14-15) In a way that was radically opposed to the lords and rulers of this world who abuse their power to oppress and exploit others, the disciple must be ready to become *diakonos* and *doulos* of all. (Mk 10:42-43)

A baptized Christian called to become a deacon personifies the universal call to serve in the manner of Christ to witness his presence and care.

- A deacon has the amazing ability to perceive unmet needs in the community.
- A deacon has tender love to comfort neighbors by his personal and gentle solicitude.
- A deacon has a passion for the Gospel of Christ to be known by proclamation, instruction, witness, or remote preparation for those who are still away from the practice of the faith. It is such an honor to be called “a herald of the Gospel.”
- A deacon has the concerns of the needy so that the church may be seen as the church with the poor and for the poor.
- A deacon is a strong man of prayer for the church, and you will often find him with priests and the bishop in the assembly of prayer.
- A deacon is a prophetic presence and a voice advocating for the unborn, prisoners, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, and for all those in the peripheries of society.

It is so fitting for the two new deacons to make their own Mary’s Magnificat in the depth of their hearts. For the rest of their lives, they will pray the Magnificat in the evening in praise and worship with the prayer of the Liturgy of Vespers for the salvation of the world. Let their families join them in the Magnificat by giving thanks with resounding gratitude for all the *mirabilia Dei*, all blessings the Lord has given to the family by calling one of their sons to holy orders for God’s service.

A family is not deprived of a son who gives his life for God’s service; this gift from on high greatly blesses a family. At times these blessings are intangible and invisible because, by their nature, they deal in the world of grace. An immense fruitfulness follows a good servant of the Lord, including the life of the family in multiple ways.

The Magnificat reflects the spirituality of the poor of the Lord (the *anawin*), those humble, simple, modest people who serve God and neighbor selflessly. The Lord acts through people like Mary, who says: “My Savior has done great things for me...they will call me blessed.” Today, we celebrate her wonderful Assumption into heaven.

Today, let us also all bring the Magnificat to our hearts with joy. As the mentor of St Augustine, St Ambrose said: “May Mary’s soul be in each one to magnify the Lord, may Mary’s spirit be in each one to rejoice in God; if, according to the flesh, the Mother of Christ is one alone, according

to the faith all souls bring forth Christ; each, in fact, welcomes the Word of God within...Mary's soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God because, consecrated in soul and spirit to the Father and to the Son, she adores with devout affection one God..."

As St John Paul II, said so often: "let our lives be a Magnificat for God!"