

Statement for Website  
From Fr. Michael Basque

10 May 2020

Whenever anyone asks me for my ordination date, I usually respond March 4, 1989. It was on that date I was ordained a Deacon for the Diocese of St. Catharines by Bishop Wall at St. Augustine's Seminary in Toronto. The reason why I reply with that date and not May 27, 1989 when I was ordained a Priest by Bishop Fulton is because of something that happened during the Ordination Mass: I understood on a very deep level that I would spend the rest of my life serving God and His people. Although as a Priest I am able to serve in ways I could not as a Deacon (celebrate Mass, hear Confessions, anoint the sick and dying), the foundation of my whole life as a Priest was laid on that day.

In today's First Reading, seven men are appointed Deacons to enable the early Church to carry out more effectively its mission. The creation of the Diaconate was a response to a pastoral problem facing the community: the proper distribution of food to widows of the Hellenists and Hebrews. The early Church was growing rapidly and there needed to be a change in how various services were provided. The Twelve would focus on preaching the Word of God while the others would devote their attention to acts of charity. The community was called together, seven men were chosen to fulfill the new roles, prayers were offered on their behalf and hands were laid on them to signify the conferring of the Holy Spirit. The word Deacon was derived from the Greek term "diakonia" which meant "service". These men were now servants of the whole community. Jesus points out in the Gospel why this service was so essential. His earthly ministry was limited by space and time. After Jesus went back to His Father, these new Deacons and their successors, would through their actions "do greater works than these" by bringing the Gospel message to the entire world.

Catholics and other people of faith are called to make service of God and their neighbour a defining quality of their faith life. For Catholics, this call is not restricted to Deacons or those in ordained ministry. As Vatican II makes clear, the universal call to holiness means everyone has a role to play in spreading the Gospel message through their service to others. During this Covid-19 pandemic, some may think the opportunities to serve others are limited. However, our service may take the form of praying for those with the disease, their families, the medical staff who care for them and those who have died and their families. It may include telephoning elderly neighbours just to check up on them. It may involve listening to family and friends as they share their fears or concerns about the virus. Finally, it may include financially supporting groups like the St. Vincent De Paul Society or Community Care so they can help the needy.

Every time I get frustrated or disillusioned about some problem in the Parish, I think back to what happened to me on March 4, 1989. For the past 31 years, it has been a privilege to serve God and his people. After I remember that fact, I get back to work.