

My Dear Permanent Deacons:

The Church discovers more and more the richness of the permanent diaconate. Whenever Bishops come to the Congregation for the Clergy, on the occasion of their *ad limina* visits, the theme of the diaconate, among others, is often commented upon and the prelates are generally very much pleased and full of hope in regard to you, Permanent Deacons. This fills all of us with joy. The Church thanks you and recognizes your dedication to your qualified ministerial work. At the same time, the Church would like to encourage you on the way of personal sanctification, in your prayer lives and in the spirituality of the diaconate. To you one can equally apply what the Pope has said to priests, for the Year for Priests, that is that it is necessary “to work in favor of this pull of priests toward spiritual perfection, upon which, above all, depends the efficacy of their ministry.” (discourse of March 16, 2009).

Today, on this feast of St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr, I would like to invite you to reflect upon two areas, your ministry of the Word, and your ministry of Charity.

We recall with gratitude the Synod on the Word of God, celebrated in October of last year. We, ordained ministers, have received from the Lord, through the mediation of the Church, the task of preaching the Word of God to the ends of the earth, announcing the person of Jesus Christ, who has died and risen, His Word and His Kingdom, to every creature. This Word, as the final Message of the Synod affirms, has one voice which is His, Revelation, has one will which is His, Jesus Christ, and one Way which is His, Missionary Activity. To know Revelation, to adhere unconditionally to Jesus Christ as a fascinated and enamored disciple, to base oneself always upon Jesus Christ and to be with Him in our Mission, this is then what awaits a permanent deacon, decisively and without any reservation. From a good disciple a good missionary is born.

The ministry of the Word which, in a special way for Deacons, has as its great model St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr, requires of ordained ministers a constant struggle to study it and carry it out, at the same time as one proclaims it to others. Meditation, following the style of *lectio divina*, that is, prayerful reading, is one well traveled and much counseled way to understand and live the Word of God, and make it one's own. At the same time, intellectual, theological and pastoral formation is a challenge which endures throughout life. A qualified and up to date ministry of the Word very much depends upon this in depth formation.

We are awaiting, in the proximate future, a document of the Holy Father regarding the Synod which we have referred to. This must be welcomed with an openness of heart and with profound commitment to study it.

The second reflection regards the ministry of Charity, taking as a great model St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr. The diaconate has its roots in the early Church's efforts to organize charitable works. At Rome, in the third century, during a period of great persecution of Christians, the extraordinary figure of St. Lawrence appears. He was archdeacon of Pope Sixtus II, and his trustee for the administration of the goods of the community. Our well beloved Pope Benedict XVI says regarding St. Lawrence: “His solicitude for the poor, his generous service which he rendered to the Church of Rome in the area of relief and of charity, his fidelity to the Pope, from him he was thrust forward to the point of wanting to undergo the supreme test of martyrdom and the heroic witness of his blood, rendered only a few days later. These are universally recognized facts.” (Homily Basilica of St. Lawrence, November 30, 2008). From St. Lawrence we also take note of the affirmation “the riches of the Church are the poor.” He assisted the poor with great generosity. He is thus an ever more present example to permanent deacons. We must love the poor in a preferential way, as did Jesus Christ; to be united with them, to work towards constructing a just,

fraternal and peaceful society. The recent encyclical letter of Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), should be our updated guide. In this encyclical the Holy Father affirms as a fundamental principle “Charity is the royal road of the social doctrine of the Church” (n. 2). Deacons must identify themselves in a very special way with charity. The poor are part of your daily ambiance, and the object of your untiring concern. One could not understand a Deacon who did not personally involve himself in charity and solidarity toward the poor, who again today are multiplying in number.

My dear Permanent Deacons, may God bless you with all his love and make you happy in your vocation and mission! With respect and admiration, I greet the wives and children of those of you who are married. The Church thanks you for the support and multifaceted collaboration which you give to your respective spouses and fathers in their diaconal ministry. In addition, the Year for Priests invites us to manifest our appreciation for our dear priests, and to pray for them and with them.

Vatican City, Feast of St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr, August 10, 2009

Claudio Cardinal Hummes  
Archbishop Emeritus of Sao Paulo  
Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy