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## Jubilee of deacons: apostles and servants open to the surprises of God

Vatican City, 30 May 2016 – Apostles and servants of Christ, as St. Paul writes – these are two terms that can never be separated, like the two sides of the same coin, as Pope Francis remarked during the Mass celebrated in St. Peter's Square on the occasion of the Jubilee of Permanent Deacons. Jesus was the first to show us their dual nature: "He, the Word of the Father, Who brought us the good news, indeed, who is the good news, became our servant. He came 'not to be served, but to serve'", and as St. Polycarp remarked, "He became the servant (diakonos) of all".

"A disciple of Jesus cannot take a road other than that of the Master", the Holy Father underlined in his homily. "If he wants to proclaim him, he must imitate Him. ... In other words, if evangelising is the mission entrusted at baptism to each Christian, serving is the way that mission is carried out. It is the only way to be a disciple of Jesus ... never wearying of the Christian life, which is a life of service."

The first step in being good and faithful servants is being willing and available. "A servant daily learns detachment from doing everything his own way and living his life as he would. ... He knows that his time is not his own, but a gift from God which is then offered back to him. ... One who serves is not a slave to his own agenda, but ever ready to deal with the unexpected. ... One who serves is open to surprises, to God's constant surprises. A servant knows how to open the doors of his time and inner space for those around him, including those who knock on those doors at odd hours. ... One who serves is not worried about the timetable. It deeply troubles me when I see a timetable in a parish: 'From such a time to such a time'. And then? There is no open door, no priest, no deacon, no layperson to receive people... This is not good. Don't worry about the timetable: have the courage to look past the timetable."

"Today's Gospel also speaks to us of service", he continued. "It shows us two servants who have much to teach us: the servant of the centurion whom Jesus cures and the centurion himself, who serves the Emperor. The words used by the centurion to dissuade Jesus from coming to his house are remarkable, and often the very opposite of our own: 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof'. ... Jesus marvels at these words. He is struck by the centurion's great humility, by his meekness."

Meekness, the Holy Father continued, "is one of the virtues of deacons. When a deacon is meek, then he is one who serves, who is not trying to 'mimic' priests; no, he is meek. Given his troubles, the centurion might have

been anxious and could have demanded to be heard, making his authority felt. He could have insisted and even forced Jesus to come to his house. Instead, he was modest, and unassuming and meek; he did not raise his voice or make a fuss. He acted, perhaps without even being aware of it, like God Himself, who is 'meek and humble of heart'. For God, Who is love, out of love is ever ready to serve us. He is patient, kind and always there for us; He suffers for our mistakes and seeks the way to help us improve. These are the characteristics of Christian service; meek and humble, it imitates God by serving others: by welcoming them with patient love and unflagging sympathy, by making them feel welcome and at home in the ecclesial community, where the greatest are not those who command but those who serve. And never shout, never. This, dear deacons, is how your vocation as ministers of charity will mature: in meekness.

After the Apostle Paul and the centurion, the readings also show a third servant, whom Jesus heals. The Gospel tells us that he was dear to his master and was sick, without naming his grave illness. "In a certain sense, we can see ourselves in that servant", commented Pope Francis. "Each of us is very dear to God, Who loves us, chooses us and calls us to serve. Yet each of us needs first to be healed inwardly. To be ready to serve, we need a healthy heart: a heart healed by God, one which knows forgiveness and is neither closed nor hardened. We would do well each day to pray trustingly for this, asking to be healed by Jesus, to grow more like Him, He Who 'no longer calls us servants but friends'."

"Dear deacons", he concluded, "this is a grace you can implore daily in prayer. You can offer the Lord your work, your little inconveniences, your weariness and your hopes in an authentic prayer that brings your life to the Lord and the Lord to your life. When you serve at the table of the Eucharist, there you will find the presence of Jesus, Who gives himself to you so that you can give yourselves to others. In this way, available in life, meek of heart and in constant dialogue with Jesus, you will not be afraid to be servants of Christ, and to encounter and caress the flesh of the Lord in the poor of our time."

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