

# Deepening the Call: Reflections on the Diaconate

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## Pope Saint John Paul II and Servanthood

Pope Saint John Paul II, though writing little on the diaconate, nonetheless consistently emphasized the concept of Christ the Servant throughout his pontificate. Drawing upon his extensive writings, we can gain a deeper insight of Christ's redemptive love expressed in sacrifice. In what follows, I will briefly explore some of John Paul's thoughts, revealing Christ's selfless service as an exemplary model not only for the diaconate but, in and through our ministry, for all humanity.

Saint John Paul often turned to the New Testament to underscore Christ's servant leadership. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus proclaims, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (Mk 10:45)." This declaration captures the essence of Christ's mission to humanity. By washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus demonstrated humility and set an enduring example of service to others. John Paul emphasized that Jesus' servanthood extended beyond physical acts; it encompassed the ultimate service of self-sacrifice on the cross, offering redemption and salvation to all. Put another way, authentic Christian service must be, at its core, sacrificial.

For Saint John Paul, the Eucharist held immense significance in understanding Christ's servanthood. In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he highlighted the Last Supper as the supreme example of Jesus' self-giving love. Christ's act of washing the disciples' feet during this meal revealed the deep connection between the Eucharist and service. By offering His Body and Blood in the sacrament, Christ invites His followers to imitate His selfless service and love. The Eucharist, as the source and summit of Christian life, nurtures and strengthens believers in their call to serve one another.

John Paul emphasized that participation in the Eucharist is not merely a passive act but an active engagement with Christ's servant nature. Through the reception of the Eucharist, believers are united with Christ, who empowers them to live a life of humble service, imitating His example in their daily lives.

Throughout his life and ministry, John Paul challenged the faithful to embrace the "logic of the Gospel," a logic that prioritizes service over self-centeredness. In his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, he stressed that this logic counters the prevailing culture of individualism and materialism. By imitating Christ the Servant, believers can transcend selfish desires and commit themselves to the well-being of others.

In all of this, John Paul reminded the faithful that authentic service requires humility, compassion, and a willingness to prioritize the needs of others above personal gain. He emphasized that true greatness lies in serving others, echoing Christ's teaching that, "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (Mk 10:43)." He called upon the faithful to extend the spirit of servanthood to all spheres of life, including family, work, and society. By embodying Christ's selflessness and sacrificial love, believers can transform their communities and promote a culture of love, justice, and solidarity.

John Paul's writings provide profound insights into Christ's role as a servant leader and by extension, what it means to be a deacon. By highlighting Christ's servanthood in Scripture, emphasizing the significance of the Eucharist as the source of servanthood, and calling Christians to embrace the "logic of the Gospel," Pope Saint John Paul invites all believers to follow Christ's example and actively serve others.

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