

Deepening the Call: Reflections on the Diaconate

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Worship as the Source of Diaconal Life

In a culture that prizes productivity, efficiency, and visible outcomes, it is easy, even within the Church, to measure ministry by activity rather than by authenticity. We instinctively ask what is being done, how much is being accomplished, and whether results can be seen. Quiet fidelity, patient presence, and contemplative attentiveness rarely register as success. Yet the Church's wisdom consistently points in the opposite direction: authentic ministry flows not from frenetic doing but from a rightly ordered way of being.

This tension has particular significance for the permanent diaconate. Because diaconal ministry is outward-facing and concrete, the deacon can gradually be understood, and even come to understand himself, primarily in terms of function. Roles fulfilled, programs coordinated, and services rendered can subtly eclipse the deeper truth of the diaconate as a sacramental way of life. When this occurs, ministry risks becoming utilitarian rather than ecclesial, sustained more by personal effort than by grace.

The Church teaches otherwise. Holy Orders configures the ordained not merely for tasks but for communion and mission rooted in Christ himself. The deacon's service is not self-generated; it is participation in the self-giving love of Christ the Servant. For this reason, diaconal ministry cannot be sustained by activity alone. It must flow from an interior life shaped by prayer, obedience, and worship.

The privileged place where this interior life is formed and renewed is the liturgy. In the Church's worship, the deacon learns again and again that he is not the principal actor. He does not initiate the sacred action; he enters into it. God acts first. The deacon receives before he responds, listens before he speaks, and offers himself only after being drawn into Christ's own self-offering. Liturgy teaches receptivity, humility, and attentiveness, virtues essential to authentic service.

This receptive posture is not passive. The gestures, silences, words, and rhythms of the liturgy shape the deacon interiorly, forming habits of reverence and trust. Worship becomes a school of being. Over time, faithful participation frees the deacon from self-referential patterns of ministry and reorients him toward communion. His liturgical service ceases to be merely functional and becomes sacramental; a visible sign of an interior configuration to Christ the Servant.

From this sustained relationship with Christ emerges a stable identity. The deacon is not defined by permissions, assignments, or visibility, but by sacramental configuration received once and deepened throughout life. Liturgy safeguards this truth because it constantly places the

deacon within a reality greater than himself. In worship, he is reminded that he belongs to the Church before he serves her and is claimed by Christ before he is sent on mission.

Only when this identity is securely grounded does mission arise in its proper form. Mission is not activity undertaken to justify one's role or to prove usefulness. It is the natural outflow of communion. The dismissal at the end of Mass is not a break from worship but its extension. Charity, proclamation, and leadership take on a Eucharistic character when they flow from the altar rather than from urgency or anxiety. Service becomes participation in Christ's own *diakonia* rather than a collection of tasks to be managed.

The pastoral implications are significant. Functionalism, activism, and liturgical minimalism, so common in contemporary ecclesial life, gradually erode the interior life of the deacon. When worship is approached instrumentally or reduced to what is strictly necessary, its formative power is weakened. Ministry then becomes reactive, fragmented, and exhausting. By contrast, when worship is reclaimed as central and formative, ministry regains coherence, joy, and evangelical fruitfulness.

The renewal of the diaconate will not be achieved simply by expanding responsibilities or increasing activity. It will come through a disciplined return to worship as the source of being. When the deacon allows prayer and liturgy to shape who he is, what he does becomes transparent, ordered, and life-giving. Service flows naturally from communion, and ministry becomes an extension of the offering first made at the altar.

In this way, the deacon stands before the Church and the world not merely as one who serves, but as a sacramental sign of Christ the Servant. His life bears witness to a truth the Church must continually recover: before we act, we must receive; before we serve, we must adore; and only from being formed in worship can authentic service endure.

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