

# Deepening the Call: Reflections on the Diaconate

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## The Temptation to Compromise

If we weren't aware before, many of us realize shortly after ordination that our diaconate doesn't shield us from the many secular influences of society. To be sure, like the other sacraments, we receive grace at ordination and, to be sure, that grace is sufficient to resist these influences (2Cor 12:9). However, grace isn't magic, and it requires that we're properly disposed to receive it. Such a disposition allows us to cooperate with God's grace so that we are more capable of choosing the good and avoiding the evil. As clerics who live a lay life, there are times and situations that tempt us, either actively or passively, to compromise our faith. This is particularly true when the people we love fall away from Christ and His Church and those people happen to be family.

It's fair to observe that, among clergy, deacons have a more intense relationship with their families. This in no way suggests that bishops and priests are not close to parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews. It's instead to state that, for deacons, their relationship to their wives and children are on a completely different level and because of this require greater attention. We're bound to our spouses through sacramental love and, because of this, share in their lives in a close and intimate way. This is true, albeit in a different way, with our children. They arise out of this relationship with our wives and, particularly when they're young, are completely dependent on us. Even when they're grown and have their own families, there's still a closeness we share that goes deep.

Though we raise our children in the faith, they may, in the choices they make and in the things they do, reject that faith. Depending on the severity of this rejection, this can cause within the deacon and his wife great pain and heartache. In the midst of this, there's a tendency to look within our selves and question whether we've been the best of parents. We can reexamine the past with a critical eye looking for our faults. To be sure, we can always find fault within ourselves, after all, none of us are perfect. I sometimes have to remind myself and others that, if our children are the measure of our parenthood, then God as Father of all is a terrible parent because, with the exception of the Blessed Mother, all His children are sinners. Free will, the same free will that makes possible good choices, equally makes possible bad choices.

All of this is made more challenging by an ever-increasing secularism. Many of the Judeo-Christian principles that formed the basis of American culture have been abandoned such that, what was aberrant is now commonplace. Abortion, fornication, contraception, adultery, homosexual acts and "gender fluidity" to name a few are, to a greater or lesser degree, widely accepted in our culture as the new norm. These actions, which the Church considers objectively

sinful, can be found in social media, movies, video games and advertisements. We are inundated with a moral ideology contrary to the Gospel at every turn. It's in the air we breathe and the water we drink. Because of this, it can impact the deacon at every level wearing him down little by little. Without a strong interior life, a life that finds its nourishment in the sacraments and support in Christian fellowship, the deacon can be tempted to compromise his faith, not just as father and husband, but as a minister of God's Church.

In all of this we can take great consolation in the wisdom of one of the most beloved parables, that of the Prodigal Son. Observe that, once the son leaves the father, the father doesn't follow him into the wilderness. The father was no doubt torn, perhaps even tempted to follow his son in the hope that by accompanying him, he might convince his son to return. This may, to some, seem like the most compassionate thing to do, but it isn't. By following his son into the wilderness, the father would have had to abandon his home, his wife, and his other children. He would have to trudge through the same sinful territory watching his son waste his inheritance on a life of dissipation while, at the same time, depriving those at home of his presence. Consequently, in his attempt to be loving, he would do the less loving thing because, despite his words, his actions may appear to tacitly approve of his son's disobedience. Instead, he allows his son to leave while all the time waiting, praying, and hoping for his return. When his son finally comes to his senses and returns, the father rushes to greet him and welcomes him back to the family.

The parable provides valuable insight on how we, as deacon fathers, should act when our children depart from the Gospel. In the anguish that often follows, we may be tempted to walk with them into the wilderness in the hope that we can become a bridge for their return. This can easily compromise our own faith; if not by doing evil, then by avoiding the good. We, out of an imperfect love, move our "home" to be with them and, in doing so, we offer no real place to return. Why make the long and arduous trip back when dad and mom are right there and when their presence signals a certain level of approval. Beyond endangering our own faith, we can also give rise to scandal. This can and often does lead others into that same wilderness, perhaps never to return.

All of this can be gut-wrenching to a parent and is especially difficult when the spouses are at odds with each other. Of course, whatever we do, we're obliged to do with charity. However, if we're to be true to the God who created us, to the God who redeemed us, to the God who sanctifies us, we're called to remain faithful to Christ and His Church. It's important to recognize that it's not that Christ calls us away from our family, but that certain members of our family have departed from Christ and this departure compels in the heart of a parent a difficult choice.

Of course, while deacons experience this temptation, we're hardly alone. Every person of faith has experienced this kind of loss. Nonetheless, by remaining steadfast and by offering up our sufferings in union with Christ, our prayers become more powerful. Along with these, our

sufferings move beyond the mere endurance of pain to become redemptive; redemptive for ourselves and perhaps even redemptive for those we love. This in turn has the capacity to transform our attitudes from the temptation to compromise to the steadfast desire to remain faithful.

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