



**Sermon for the Ordination of Jim Cole
By the Most Revd Dr. S. E. McLaughlin
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Deacons First

A Sermon Regarding the Responsibilities of Deacons in the Holy Order of the Church

In the Name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Ordinations to the Diaconate are special. They are first in the ordained service of our Lord Christ. This is the time to consider the basic questions of our call, to face the foundational issues in ministry. While my remarks this morning are directed to you, Jim, I hope that this sermon will be edifying to everyone: clergy and laity. I hope it will cause us to take time to reflect upon our relationship to Jesus Christ and consider what our calling is-- what our service is-- in His kingdom, because each of us has a calling.

Jim, today you offer yourself to Christ and His Church as a Servant-- a Deacon, in the Holy Order of the Church. I am very proud to be your ordaining Bishop. I have worked with you in various ways-- in the classes you have taken and in the conversations we have had-- to help bring you to this momentous day in your life. You have worked here as an intern at the Chapel. You have spent years preparing for today. Everyone arrives at this day from a different route and we can never tell where or how we will end up, literally around the world in our service to God. Yet today, God has brought you here-- to begin your journey as his servant.

Servant, minister, slave!

As you travel this path of service, I believe that you will find ministry in the Lord's kingdom revolves around a handful of simple, yet profound truths. These truths involve a concentration, an unwavering attention to knowing for whom you work, knowing what is really important, knowing who you are, and knowing your calling. As a Deacon-- a slave of Jesus Christ in the Church-- whom do you work for? I know you're probably saying, "Ah, bishop, I know who I work for."

There are many who come to the Church to be ordained, seeking power just for themselves. In Acts (chapter 8) Simon, of Samaria, attempted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from the Apostles. The history of the Church is filled with the stories of people serving anyone but God in the Church. This is an important-- if not *the* most

important-- thing to remember. As a Deacon, who do you work for? This many seem obvious-- but there will come a time in your life-- when you must remember that you work for Jesus Christ, and no one else.

The next deceptively simple truth is *knowing what is really important*. People come to the church for many, many reasons, only a few of which have anything to do with God! In many ways, well-meaning people will lure you into controversy: picking sides and taking issue with matters that aren't really important. Many of the questions that have torn the Church apart are nonessential questions-- that's especially apparent in the so-called Anglican Continuum. The Jews of Jesus' day suffered from the same sort of religious idolatry: "You pay the tithes on mint and anise and cumin, said our Lord, but omit the weightier matters of the Law--judgment, mercy and faith."

Just as you work for Jesus Christ, your mission is the Gospel. We are not called to the Holy Order of the church to perpetuate a jurisdiction, or Anglicanism, or a particular style of churchmanship, or the use of a particular prayer book-- we are here for the sake of the Gospel: that by our hands and the power of God working in us, people may be saved from sin and eternal death.

Know what is really important, and do not be moved away from it. When you are approached by someone, seeking to embroil you in some controversy-- tell him what our Lord told Peter, "get thee behind me Satan... for you are not following the thoughts of God, but the thoughts of men."

Do you remember that biblical passage?

Peter had just said to Jesus, "you are the Christ the son of the living God." And Jesus said, "blessed are you Peter... upon this Rock will I build my church... and I must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die...." Then Peter said, "Oh no! No, no! That doesn't happen to the Messiah. You're mistaken." And Jesus replied to Peter, "you're taking me off the path-- get behind me."

Know what's really important-- stay on the path. Don't become embroiled in the politics or personalities that prey on the Church.

Know who you work for; know what's really important.

Next, you must know yourself. You must be willing to submit your motivations, intentions, and actions, to honest and sometimes scathing self-examination. I'm certain that you have already run into a wall where you said to yourself, "I'm not ready for that class yet... I don't think I'm ready for the canonical exams... I don't have to start that prayer group yet... Things are real hectic at home right now; I'll get something started soon."

In Holy Orders, *what you don't do is as important as what you do*. For everything that you do, or do not do, has a benefit to someone. And that is the question you must ask yourself: is what I am doing now of benefit to the kingdom of our Lord, or to the kingdom of this world? This is the question you will face for the rest of your life. As long as you answer that question with complete and brutal honesty, you will remain in the

will of God for your ministry. The choice is often obvious, but the honesty in answering is sometimes very difficult. You must know yourself, Jim. You must determine to ruthlessly test your words and deeds, that all you say and do is of real benefit to the kingdom of our Lord.

Know whom you work for. Know what is really important. Know yourself.

Finally, you must know your calling. *No man is adequately prepared for Holy Orders.* I can tell you from personal experience: you will feel inadequate to the job! But, you must deeply apprehend, that what God has willed for you as one of his men in Holy Orders, he will assuredly bring to pass in your life.

Know your calling: cultivate spiritual courage, be fearlessly open to the strengthening hand of the Spirit of God. Do not shrink from what God is able to accomplish in you and with you. This is necessary, Jim, because today is but the first step in your pilgrimage as a Holy Man of God. In this next year you must prepare yourself for the priesthood-- to undergo the spiritual formation of one entrusted with the sacramental power of the creator of the universe. Now you must learn the mysteries of the spiritual power of the Church, committed to it by our Lord, and prepare yourself to become a channel of His transforming grace.

Know you who work for, know what is really important, know yourself, and know your calling.

Simple ideas, but they are the stuff the universe is built upon; the ideas that will carry you through your pilgrimage as a Holy Man of God. In your daily walk on this pilgrimage, you must be fed by the study of scripture, by prayer, and by the frequent reception of our Lord in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

Scripture, prayer, communion!

And finally, Jim, you must understand what is about to happen to your soul. The pull that you have experienced your whole life, toward God and the things of the spirit-- all the searching, all the reading, all the contemplation-- will be fulfilled in just a few minutes from now.

When a man is placed into the Holy Order of the Church, it puts a mark on his soul for all eternity. Once it is done, it can't be taken back. Often this makes men eternally afraid. You can try to run away from God, as Jonah did, without success. You will be assailed by the enemy of our Lord, who continually wars against the saints, to turn your back on the ministry. I pray in the day of testing-- and those days come often-- that you will remain steadfast in your calling.

Remember what our Lord said to the Apostle Peter, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (St. Luke 22:31,32)

Know you who work for, know what is really important, know yourself, and know your calling.

To keep these precepts will bring joy in your ministry. To neglect them will cause your ministry to be a misery.

After today, you will always be a Deacon, a *slave* of Jesus Christ. +Tom may be a Bishop, I may be a Bishop, Fr. Kennedy here may be a priest, but we are all still Deacons-- *we are Deacons first!* Today you join us and all of the others in an unbroken line, back to the Apostles, in a Holy Fellowship of humble service. May the Holy Spirit, as we participate in this ordination, renew in each of us the sacred bonds that connect us to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.