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## The Office of the Metropolitan Archbishop

**Sermon for the Ordination of David Brooks to the Diaconate,  
Preached by Archbishop McLaughlin, February 9 AD 2002.**

As a teenager growing up in a fundamentalist household, one of the things we were expected to do was to have “quiet time” or “daily devotions” in the morning. Daily devotions really boiled down to reading a line or two of scripture and a snippet of a prayer from one of the pocket books of daily devotions. You’ve seen these. They are fine, as far as they go. But I can remember thinking at the time that my faith should mean more—it should require more—than a few minutes snatched out of a busy morning. It took me years to find out that devotion isn’t something you do; devotion is given to Someone. True devotion is the highest and most all-embracing gift a human being can give to another, or to a cause.

Consider the strength of the statement, “I am devoted to my children”; or “I am devoted to my job.” What does that say about that person’s values? Or use of time?

“Devoted” is the one of the strongest words in our language. It means that all our thoughts and all our actions are aimed at one purpose. It encompasses our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions every day.

For several months now, I have been earnestly praying for God’s guidance for a word to describe our approach to the ministry; a word that depicts our Way of practicing the Faith. In the past few weeks the Lord gave me this word, devotion, and the phrase “Devotion to Christ” as an expression of our life in the Kingdom of God.

To say with conviction, “I am devoted to Christ,” is to say that all other concerns, all other relationships, are subsumed and defined by my devotion to Him; no earthly worry displaces fidelity to His cause. Indeed, love for those closest to us follows and is secondary to the primary devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of the puzzling statement recorded in St. Luke chapter 14, when Jesus said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” Jesus doesn’t call us to hate: he calls us to devotion.

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This word, “devotion” crops up in other ways. Often, when we try to describe someone fully dedicated to his church, we say, “He is a devout Roman Catholic”; or, “she is a devout Baptist.” Both the terms “devote” and “devout” spring from the same Latin word: a word that originally meant sacrifice. To be devout means that you have sacrificed yourself in the interests of the one to whom devotion is rendered.

It is this call to sacrifice that is made by those who offer themselves to minister in Holy Orders, to serve God for the sake of the Gospel. But devotion to Christ is the key to unlocking a meaningful existence for every Christian, clergy and laity. The answer to all of life's problems, according to Christ, is setting the right priority, putting whole-hearted devotion to God first. This is the meaning of Jesus' saying, in St. Matthew chapter 6, "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

Jesus calls us to give up something in order to gain more. He taught us that the essential paradox of the Kingdom of heaven is that it is gained only by the complete sacrifice of ourselves to the King, while heaven itself is lost in our attempt to grasp at personal autonomy. Jesus once said to his disciples, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The call of Christ is the call to the cross, to die, and by dying to this world to live forever in glory with Him. As someone else once remarked, such a sacrifice is indeed the "last full measure of devotion."

The Bible is filled with references to such devotion. The Old Testament book of Leviticus describes the process of giving people or things to the use of God. Verse 28 says, "But no *devoted* thing that a man devotes to the LORD, of anything that he has...[it] is most holy to the LORD." God entirely owns an object or a person devoted to Him: once the devotion is given, it cannot be taken back and made to serve the mundane uses of man.

The Psalmist in Psalm 119 declares, "Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is *devoted* to thy fear. Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness. Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word." To be devoted to Christ is to experience God's mercy and to have the Word of God alive in your soul.

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In St. Luke's gospel we read of Simeon, blessed by God to see the Messiah before his death. Chapter two reads, "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was *just and devout*, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." To this day we sing Simeon's words in worship—and testify to the answer to his prayer. When you are devoted to Christ, God answers the deepest longings of your heart.

In one of our prayers today we heard about St. Stephen the leader of the first Deacons ever ordained, and the first martyr of the Church. In Acts, chapter eight we are told, "And *devout* men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." These men pushed their way through a murderous crowd to rescue the body of their fallen brother. True devotion to Christ gives us strength, even in the face of calamity.

In Acts, chapter 10, Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, whom God used to show the Apostles that the Gospel was to be preached to all people, is described as, “*a devout man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” God intervenes to answer the prayers of those devoted to Him.

The earliest of St. Paul’s epistles were written to the Christians at Thessalonica: in Acts, chapter 17, these are described as “*devout*” Greeks who had attended the Jewish synagogue and responded to the preaching of Paul and Timothy. If you are devoted to Christ, you will respond with all of your heart to the preaching and teaching of Truth.

When St. Paul was stricken blind on the road to Damascus, and Paul himself was converted to the faith, God told Ananias, to lay his hands on Paul, and his sight would be restored. Remember, at that time Paul was persecuting Christians. Ananias had reason to fear for his life. But he obeyed God. In Acts chapter 22, when Paul related the story of his conversion, he called Ananias “*a devout man* according to the law.” If you are devoted to Christ, God will use you to build his kingdom.

The Bible equates devotion to God as one’s highest aspiration: an aspiration that is in turn symbolized by sacrifice. This sacrifice of our selves to God is, in the New Testament, referred to as *slavery*. We were bought by the price of Christ’s blood; He has redeemed us—we are now His property. This concept of slavery to Christ is most clearly seen in the biblical teaching on the ordained ministry.

This stark reality is obscured by modern terms, like “minister.” We say, “so-and-so” is an ordained Minister. According to the Bible, to “minister” is to serve, and most of our English language versions of the Bible hide the fact that a minister, or a servant of God, is (in the original language) in reality called a slave. The first verse of the book of Romans begins, “Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, [and] separated unto the gospel of God.” It is often said that the clerical collar was patterned after the torque, the brass collar used in Roman times to mark one as a slave.

Jesus calls us to servitude. But the slavery of the church again stands as a paradox: ours is an hierarchy of servitude, built on the orders of laity, deacons, priests and bishops. And the higher one ascends this hierarchy, the more abased he becomes. In St. Matthew’s gospel, chapter 20, it is recorded that Jesus called his disciples to him, and said, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

This spiritual service was illustrated today, David, in your ordination. As a Deacon, you wear a stole—the symbol of spiritual power since the days of the Old Testament—across one shoulder. Some say this symbolizes that you have taken half of the yoke of Christ. As a Priest the stole is placed across both shoulders: symbolizing that one is now harnessed for life in the service of the Savior, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, but only if we are devoted to Him.

David, you will feel from time to time that you cannot fulfill the depth of commitment the devotion to Christ ordination requires. None of us do. In Luke 17:10, Jesus reminds us, at the end of the day, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are *unprofitable servants*: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

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Our duty, as servants, is also clearly seen in the Prayer Book. The concept of devotion as the highest representation of our Faith is seen in every section. In the Book of Common Prayer Divine Service rendered to God is itself called “the *devout* prayers of the Church”.

And although it is our custom always to kneel when we pray to God, in the bidding prayer preceding the confession of sin at Holy Communion, the priest bids that we confess our sins “*devoutly kneeling*.” Think about that. At the moment before we come into the mystical, sacramental presence of our Lord in the Eucharist we must examine ourselves, confess our sins and receive absolution before “we presume to eat of that bread and drink of that cup.” Such devotion is a part of the essential sacrifice called for in the life of one dedicated to Christ: to give up those actions and omissions, those thoughts and attitudes, that are in conflict with our call to be inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Likewise, in the service to consecrate a church the Prayer Book describes those who, from the days of the Old Testament, sacrificed of their time and wealth to establish new parishes as “*devout and holy men*.” Evangelism is itself a function of sacrifice, whereby we pour ourselves into the enrichment of the lives of others, so that all whom we come into contact may know something of the love of God found in Jesus Christ.

Finally, in perhaps the greatest description of devotion ever written; certainly one of the most powerful prayers in the Prayer Book; during the service of the institution of a minister into a parish, the rubric directs the priest to kneel before the Altar and pray this prayer, “O Lord my God, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; yet thou hast honoured thy servant with appointing him to stand in thy House, and to serve at thy holy Altar. *To thee and to thy service I devote myself, body, soul, and spirit, with all their powers and faculties*. Fill my memory with the words of thy Law; enlighten my understanding with the illumination of the Holy Ghost; and may all the wishes and desires of my will center in what thou hast commanded. And, to make me instrumental in promoting the salvation of the people now committed to my charge, grant that I may faithfully administer thy holy Sacraments, and by my life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively Word. Be ever with me in the performance of all the duties of my ministry; in prayer, to quicken my devotion; in praises, to heighten my love and gratitude; and in preaching, to give a readiness of thought and expression suitable to the clearness and excellency of thy holy Word. Grant this for the sake of Jesus Christ, thy Son our Saviour.” This should be your daily prayer—no matter what your position in the church—it should be the daily prayer of every Christian, for surely we are all called as members of the Body of Christ to be his devotees in the world today.

Earlier we quoted from St. Matthew, chapter 20, where our Lord enunciated the principles of devotion to be seen in the ministry of the Church: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

This verse contains the key to understanding and pursuing devotion to Christ. For none of us are qualified, none of us are able, to match what God requires. Indeed, without the example of our Lord, we wouldn't know the depth of God's love for us. We can develop the essential qualities of devotion only because God in Christ was first *devoted to us*. The death on the cross proves that the path of heaven is paved solely by Grace. The Resurrection of our Lord from the dead proves that devotion to God is rewarded with eternal life. It is to this great honor—to this great servitude that you—and every one of us—is called. May God grant us grace to meet the duty that lies before us. AMEN.