



The Holy See

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

JUBILEE OF DEACONS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Square

Sunday, 29 May 2016

[Multimedia]

“A servant of Jesus Christ” (*Gal* 1:10). We have listened to these words that the Apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, uses to describe himself. At the beginning of his Letter, he had presented himself as “an apostle” by the will of the Lord Jesus (cf. *Gal* 1:1). These two terms – apostle and servant – go together. They can never be separated. They are like the two sides of a medal. Those who proclaim Jesus are called to serve, and those who serve proclaim Jesus.

The Lord was the first to show us this. He, the Word of the Father, who brought us the good news (*Is* 61:1), indeed, who *is* the good news (cf. *Lk* 4:18), became our servant (*Phil* 2:7). He came “not to be served, but to serve” (*Mk* 10:45). “He became the servant (*diakonos*) of all”, wrote one of the Church Fathers (Saint Polycarp, *Ad Phil.* V, 2). We who proclaim him are called to act as he did, “merciful, zealous, walking according to the charity of the Lord who made himself the servant of all” (*ibid.*). A disciple of Jesus cannot take a road other than that of the Master. If he wants to proclaim him, he must imitate him. Like Paul, he must *strive to become a servant*. In other words, if *evangelizing* is the mission entrusted at baptism to each Christian, *serving* is the way that mission is carried out. It is the only way to be a disciple of Jesus. His witnesses are those who do as he did: those who serve their brothers and sisters, never tiring of following Christ in his humility, never wearing of the Christian life, which is *a life of service*.

How do we become “good and faithful servants” (cf. *Mt* 25:21)? As a first step, we are asked to be *available*. A servant daily learns detachment from doing everything his own way and living his life

as he would. Each morning he trains himself to be generous with his life and to realize that the rest of the day will not be his own, but given over to others. One who serves cannot hoard his free time; he has to give up the idea of being the master of his day. He knows that his time is not his own, but a gift from God which is then offered back to him. Only in this way will it bear fruit. One who serves is not a slave to his own agenda, but ever ready to deal with the unexpected, ever available to his brothers and sisters and ever open to God's constant surprises. One who serves is open to surprises, to God's constant surprises. A servant knows how to open the doors of his time and inner space for those around him, including those who knock on those doors at odd hours, even if that entails setting aside something he likes to do or giving up some well-deserved rest. One who serves is not worried about the timetable. It deeply troubles me when I see a timetable in a parish: "From such a time to such a time". And then? There is no open door, no priest, no deacon, no layperson to receive people... This is not good. Don't worry about the timetable: have the courage to look past the timetable. In this way, dear deacons, if you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful.

Today's Gospel also speaks to us of service. It shows us two servants who have much to teach us: the servant of the centurion whom Jesus cures and the centurion himself, who serves the Emperor. The words used by the centurion to dissuade Jesus from coming to his house are remarkable, and often the very opposite of our own: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (7:6); "I did not presume to come to you" (7:7); "I also am a man set under authority" (7:8). Jesus marvels at these words. He is struck by the centurion's great humility, by his *meekness*. And meekness is one of the virtues of deacons. When a deacon is meek, then he is one who serves, who is not trying to "mimic" priests; no, he is meek. Given his troubles, the centurion might have been anxious and could have demanded to be heard, making his authority felt. He could have insisted and even forced Jesus to come to his house. Instead, he was modest, unassuming and meek; he did not raise his voice or make a fuss. He acted, perhaps without even being aware of it, like God himself, who is "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). For God, who is love, out of love is ever ready to serve us. He is patient, kind and always there for us; he suffers for our mistakes and seeks the way to help us improve. These are the characteristics of Christian service; meek and humble, it *imitates God by serving others*: by welcoming them with patient love and unflagging sympathy, by making them feel welcome and at home in the ecclesial community, where the greatest are not those who command but those who serve (cf. Lk 22:26). And never shout, never. This, dear deacons, is how your vocation as ministers of charity will mature: in meekness.

After the Apostle Paul and the centurion, today's readings show us a third servant, the one whom Jesus heals. The Gospel tells us that he was dear to his master and was sick, without naming his grave illness (v. 2). In a certain sense, we can see ourselves in that servant. Each of us is very dear to God, who loves us, chooses us and calls us to serve. Yet each of us needs first to be healed inwardly. To be ready to serve, we need a healthy heart: a heart healed by God, one which knows forgiveness and is neither closed nor hardened. We would do well each day to pray

trustingly for this, asking to be healed by Jesus, to grow more like him who “no longer calls us servants but friends” (cf. *Jn* 15:15). Dear deacons, this is a grace you can implore daily in prayer. You can offer the Lord your work, your little inconveniences, your weariness and your hopes in an authentic prayer that brings your life to the Lord and the Lord to your life. When you serve at the table of the Eucharist, there you will find the presence of Jesus, who gives himself to you so that you can give yourselves to others.

In this way, available in life, meek of heart and in constant dialogue with Jesus, you will not be afraid to be *servants of Christ*, and to encounter and caress the flesh of the Lord in the poor of our time.