



By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

# Empty Vessels

*Allow Christ to fill you with his grace through the sacraments*

The most profound moment of my ordination was the Litany of the Saints. As I lay on the cold marble floor, I heard the names of our brothers who preceded us: Vincent, Ephrem, Lawrence, Stephen, Francis of Assisi — saintly men of God, men of extraordinary holiness — and I began to weep as I thought, “Who am I to follow in the footsteps of these great deacons? I’m nobody.”

Then I remembered these words attributed to St. Teresa of Calcutta: “A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, must empty ourselves. ... Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in his love than in your own weakness.”

With absolute trust and confidence, the deacon must not be afraid to place

his heart and life in the hands of Christ. The Lord gave his life on the cross in a complete and perfect act of love and sacrifice. We, too, must not be afraid to live our ministry of service with passion and conviction in a world that rejects truth, goodness and beauty. We must empty ourselves of every earthly thing we believe we cannot live without so that Christ can fill us from within. We must continually live with the realization that we are always in the presence of God.

This is why the deacon, if he is to serve well, must stay close to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and reconciliation. Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation allows the deacon to say, “Lord, I love you, but I am only human and, in my weakness, I have sinned against you,” confident that he will receive God’s mercy and forgiveness. “Return to me with your whole heart, / with fasting, weeping, and mourning. / Rend your hearts, not your garments, / and return to the Lord, your God, / For he

is gracious and merciful, / slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, / and relenting in punishment” (Jl 2:12-13). Reconciliation empties us and prepares us to worthily receive the real presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist, the food that fuels our ministry of service.

In the words of Pope St. John Paul II, “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey” of faith on earth (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, No. 19). After sending forth the faithful at the end of Mass, we too must

join them in being “eucharist” to the world. One of the greatest joys we have as deacons is bringing the Eucharistic Christ to those who are homebound or in hospitals,

to assisted-living communities and prisons. They are happy to see us but even happier to see Jesus!

The deacon is a living, sacramental sign of Christ the Servant. One of the important ways an ordained deacon serves the Church is as a guardian of the Eucharist. Therefore, we can only serve well if we ourselves live a Eucharist-centered faith; only then can we share that gift with those we are called to serve: “The Eucharistic Mystery ... is the font of life that cleanses us and strengthens us to live not for ourselves but for God and to be united to each other by the closest ties of love” (*Mysterium Fidei*, No. 2). As deacons we must humbly recognize that when we give ourselves away in love, we truly find ourselves in God. Only then can we hope to lead others to Christ. **TD**

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