



By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Holy Orders: Deacons and Priests

Working together for the good of the flock

There are several interesting characteristics of shepherds who lived in the time of Christ. Shepherds lived apart from society and were largely nomadic, moving from place to place. Being a shepherd was mainly the job of single males without children who would normally work in groups looking after one large flock. The main duty of shepherds was to keep their flock intact and protect it from wolves and other predators.

The parallels between shepherds and Jesus are quite clear. He moved frequently around the region preaching the Gospel from place to place. Jesus, of course, was single and celibate, dedicating his entire life and mission to fulfilling the will of his Father. Jesus did not work alone but shared his life and mission with his disciples and apostles.

Bishops are the Church's shepherds, many of whom care for their sheep in particular churches (dioceses, archdioceses and eparchies). Priests share in this episcopal ministry by shepherding God's people in parishes and various faith communities, most especially when the sheep are being fed at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Deacons act as the shepherd's assistants. Our responsibility is to gather those in the flock who are scattered and lost and bring them to the shepherd, to the priest.

Tensions can, and sometimes do, occur between priests and deacons. This happens for a variety of reasons, but the primary catalyst, I suspect, is the priest's inadequate understanding of diaconal ministry. Although priests remain deacons after ordination to the priesthood, they only serve as deacons during the final phase of their seminary formation.

Humility is the key to working well with our priests. The shepherd and his assistant must work together for the good of the flock. We deacons who assist the shepherd and serve as elder

brothers in the parish family must honor and respect our priests with filial affection that mirrors the charity and trust we have placed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus entrusts the care of his flock to the pope and bishops of the Church on earth, who give authority to priests and deacons to assist in feeding the flock with the Word and the sacraments. It is this powerful combination that touches the hearts of those who hear them. The contemporary shepherds of the Church, with ordained deacons strengthened by the Holy Spirit to assist and support them, must boldly call and lead the sheep entrusted to their care out of this corrupt and depraved culture, and into the heart of Christ's love and mercy.

Deacons are not "half-priests." We are not "wannabe priests" or "fake priests." "The sacrament of the diaconate ... imbues the will with a special grace, so that in all his actions he will be motivated ... to serve his brothers and sisters. This service should, first of all, take the form of helping the Bishop and the priest, both in liturgical worship and the apostolate. ... The diaconate can only be conferred on those who believe in the value of the Bishop's and priest's pastoral mission and in the Holy Spirit's assistance guiding them in their actions and their decisions" (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Oct. 20, 1993, No. 2).

Let us pray for our priests and that greater collaborative efforts — sown with seeds rooted in Christlike minds and servants' hearts — will reap a harvest of brotherly cooperation and humble appreciation of the gifts priests and deacons bring to the life of the Church. **TD**

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