

## The Solemnity of Christ the King “Ambition and Discipleship”

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My friends, what are you most ambitious for? What is it that you want most for in life? This weekend we celebrate Christ the King. Indeed, Jesus tells us in the Gospel reading that we will all stand before the throne of God and be judged on how we cared for the people around us in life, especially the most vulnerable. In this way, Jesus challenges us to truly discern what is most important and what values should shape our priorities.

As many of you know, in addition to being your pastor I am also the director of deacon formation for the Archdiocese. The original plan this weekend was for me to join them for a special retreat that is required for our candidates as they, at long last, prepare for their ordination next month. They are still having the retreat, however this is being done virtually from home which is no easy task. They are joining us for Mass this Sunday (this morning) via live-stream. As difficult as it is that the class is unable to be together in person, this is nevertheless a special time for me personally. You see, I have worked with this class since they first applied for the program five years ago and I am very proud of them. My prayer this weekend is that they take as much time as they need to truly reflect where they were five years ago and compare that to where they are at today. By doing so, I hope they will recognize with awe the deep transformation that has taken place along the way.

For the benefit of our community, what is a deacon? The Sacrament of Holy Orders has three levels to it and the first is to the diaconate. By this sacrament, their inner nature will be configured to Christ for the purpose of service to the Church as a minister of the word, of the altar, and of charity caring for those in need with the heart of Jesus. In fact, the word deacon in Greek literally means “to serve”. The Gospel reading this weekend is therefore a perfect one for them to reflect upon during their retreat as it is for all of us as well.

Clearly, Jesus’ expectation to be charitable to those who are in great need applies to all the baptized. However, for the candidates preparing for ordination to the diaconate, it is important for them to understand that Christ expects them to model and publically represent what this looks like in the life of the Church, to build a bridge from the altar to the alleyway, from the ambo to the workplace, from the parish to every corner of the world, starting with their home and family. Deacons are not just called to follow this Gospel reading, they are called to model it as ordained ministers of the Catholic Church. This will be a wonderful gift and a tremendous grace. However, with it comes great responsibility and no short measure of divine accountability, as we can see clearly in our gospel reading this weekend.

And so, a good question for these candidate and for all of us gathered here today: What are you most ambitious for? What is it that you want most for in life? Now, let’s bring Jesus into the conversation. What is Jesus most ambitious for? He is ambitious for you. Jesus wants you. How far is Jesus willing to go for you? To the cross and to hell and back. That’s how far. Since Jesus is anxious to redeem us and to save us, what does Jesus’ kingship look like? It looks like proclaiming the good news, it looks like caring for the poor, it looks like healing the sick, it looks like washing feet, it looks like being among us as one who serves, and it looks like offering his Body and Blood for the sake of our salvation. For Jesus, that is what kingship looks like.

For us who will stand one day before the throne of God, and this is especially true of the ordained, we should truly consider what we are most ambitious for and whether our heart's desire matches Jesus' desire for us. Jesus by his ministry is by definition ambitious in that he seeks to save the whole world by laying down his life for others. How about you? How about us? What are we ambitious for? No matter what our vocation is in the Body of Christ, if we truly want to be part of his Body, we should probably ask ourselves: with everything in the world that is competing for my attention right now, what should I be ambitious for as I make my way with others through these difficult times?