

How well do you know the Catholic faith? Well, let's find out..."

The word peace is used very often. Could you tell me please: What is peace?

A) Peace is an emotion, that's all.

B) Peace is the consequence of justice and the sign of love put into action. Where there is peace, every creature can come to rest in good order" (Saint Thomas Aquinas). Earthly peace is the image of the peace of Christ, who reconciled heaven and earth. (CCC 2304-2305) Peace is more than the absence of war, more than a carefully maintained balance of powers (balance of terror). In a state of peace, people can live securely with their legitimately earned property and freely exchange goods with one another. In peace the dignity and right of self-determination of individuals and of peoples are respected. In peace human coexistence is characterized by brotherly solidarity.

C) Peace is just not violence.

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What does the Church say about anger. How does a Christian deal with anger?

A) St. Paul says, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26).

B) A Christian is never angry, that's means he doesn't have to deal with it.

C) Anger has nothing in common with the life of the Christian.

The Origins and ministry of a Deacon

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You may have seen him in your parish, assisting the priest at the altar. You may have seen his name listed on the parish bulletin with the title “Deacon.” You may have wondered what a deacon does in the life of the church and where the diaconate (or the Order of Deacons) came from. In this first of a series of articles, we will explore very briefly the origins and ministry of a deacon.

The beginnings of the diaconate lie in the Old Testament. In the Book of Numbers, God tells Moses to set aside one of the 12 tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi, to assist the priests in the worship of God (Nm 1:48-53). The Levites were to have charge of everything connected with the tabernacle — the tent set up in the desert where the people of Israel were to encounter the presence of God and offer Him their prayers and sacrifices. The church sees in the ministry of the Levites a prefiguration of the diaconate, reflected in the prayer of consecration used in the current Rite of Ordination of Deacons: “...as once you chose the sons of Levi to minister in the former tabernacle, so now you establish three ranks of ministers in their sacred offices to serve in your name.”

Deacons are clearly mentioned in the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles describes their origin: “Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task (i.e. distributing food and other material resources) ... They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them” (Acts 6:1-3, 6).

Again, the Rite of Ordination of Deacons, in the consecratory prayer, recalls this New Testament scene: “And so, in the first days of your church, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, your Son’s Apostles appointed seven men of good repute to assist them in the daily ministry ... By prayer and the laying on of hands they entrusted to these chosen men the ministry of serving at table.” St. Paul also refers to deacons and the qualities they should possess in his First Letter to Timothy (1 Tm 3:8-13). Later, St. Hippolytus would describe the ceremony of the ordination of deacons, involving the laying on of hands and a prayer (Apostolic Tradition 9:1-5, 9-12). St. Ignatius of Antioch regarded deacons as “ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ ... and not simply distributors of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God” (Letter to the Trallians 2).

Because of the service (*diakonia* in Greek) that deacons performed, the church continues to regard the Order of Deacons as a true ordained ministry in the church. Deacons share in the sacramental grace and character of Holy Orders, even though they are ordained not to the priesthood but to the ministry (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1569; Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, No. 29). The presence of the deacon at the altar, and his involvement in works of charity in a parish or a diocese, reminds the faithful of the service of Jesus Christ who tells us, “I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk 22:27). The living out of these characteristics is exemplified in the lives of some well-known saints who were deacons: St. Stephen, one of the original seven deacons and the first martyr of the church; St. Lawrence, martyred in Rome around A.D. 258, and St. Francis of Assisi, who remained a deacon so that he could give witness to the servanthood of Christ.

Over the centuries, the presence and ministry of deacons, for a variety of reasons, became limited to assisting the priest at Mass, and the diaconate itself was conferred almost exclusively on seminarians who were preparing for ordination as priests. The Second Vatican Council, however, wanted “to restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy” (*Lumen gentium*, No. 29), opening up also the possibility of conferring “this diaconal order even upon married men, provided they be of more mature age” (*Lumen gentium*, No. 29). The Council declared that it was up to the bishops’ conference of a nation or region to decide whether it was opportune for such men to be ordained deacons. Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, many episcopal conferences have exercised this permission, and many bishops have ordained (and continue to ordain) deacons for ministry in their dioceses.

The Rite of Ordination of Deacons, through its words and actions, addresses a three-fold service of diaconal ministry: service of the Word of God, service at the altar and service of charity. Thus today, it is the task of deacons, at the direction of the bishop or pastor, to assist in the celebration of the Mass, to distribute Holy Communion, to preside over public prayer, to administer baptism, to assist at and bless marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying, and to conduct funeral rites outside of Mass. Deacons also can proclaim the Gospel during Mass and preach the homily; they can instruct others by teaching the Faith in different settings (for example, in a parish religious education program or the RCIA or youth ministry); and they can dedicate themselves to any number of charitable works (*Lumen gentium*, No. 29; Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1571). As ordained ministers who make present in a unique manner Christ the servant, deacons offer themselves in service to the Lord and to His people in a variety of ways and enrich the life of the church by their faithful diaconal ministry.

This article is the first in a series of articles throughout the year celebrating the 50th anniversary of the reinstitution of the permanent diaconate in the United States. Other articles may be found at:

https://www.catholicerald.com/News/Catholic_Living/Religious_Vocations/The_permanent_diaconate_at_50/