

The richest rewards of the lay apostolate are to be gained in the daily communications of Christian with non-Christian: of Christian worker with non-Christian worker, Christian neighbour with non-Christian neighbour, Christian friend with non-Christian friend. The world consists of individuals before it consists of masses, and it is in the day-to-day common personal relationship of man with man that the priesthood of the Christian layman can be most fruitful.

'The Catholic faith must be put into practice in everyday life. It must blaze like a beacon over our work and ways of living. It must show itself true in our relationships with others, and prove itself noble in the deed. Christians will soon become the only bibles which people will bother to read' (*Confirmation in the Modern World*, by M. Laros, p. 80).

This is the kind of presentation of the faith every Christian ought to offer—the enlightened, illuminating witness of the man for whom the cross of Christ is a stern yet glorious reality. Amidst the confusion of thought and general barrenness of modern civilization, the Christian is the custodian of eternal values, the architect of true progress. So long as he confesses and shows forth Christ in his own life, he will be able to say, with final conviction: 'The grace of God in me hath not been vain. . . .' (1 Cor. xv, 10.)

These things should always be in our minds. Every act of love, every manifestation of charity, every declaration of faith, can lead a soul from darkness to the gates of heaven, and strengthen the edifice of Christ's Church on earth.



THE DEACON IN THE PARISH—II

JOSEPH HORNEF

Further tasks for the parish deacon

THE Church preaches our Lord through the liturgy, through the works of charity, and through the word. The vocation of deacon involves of its nature the function of preaching God's word (e.g. Stephen and Philip), and giving catechetical instruction to children and adults. To this end the deacon would need not a complete theological training, but a

sound grasp of religious knowledge. The parish would not expect him to expatiate on theological problems and principles, but they would require a simple presentation of the faith and the commandments. For this purpose they might expect that by reason of the deacon's personal contact with particular spheres of life, he could be on terms of easy familiarity with them. The deacon could also perform baptisms with the full ceremonies, and burials. If the Church were willing to legislate for it, people coming to be married could confer the sacrament on each other before him. New life could be brought to the parish apostolate of the sick, if the deacon could bring them the blessed sacrament frequently. In support of the priest, the deacon could conduct services in remote chapels-of-ease. Naturally such services would stop short of holy mass; but they could take the form of official preaching of the gospel, prayers before our Lord present in the blessed sacrament, distribution of holy communion and benediction. In this way they could go far beyond anything which an ordinary layman might be able to perform. Would not the people using such chapels-of-ease be thankful to have a deacon living in the district who could bring the faithful together before our Lord on Sundays, when the parish priest could not come? Perhaps through his apostolic work the foundations of a new parish could be laid. Serving chapels-of-ease in this way would be of special significance for the missions too. We may summarize everything in a word by saying that the deacon would be more than an assistant in the apostolate, he would be an assistant apostle.

The deacon's position in relation to the parish priest and the parish community

Since in the liturgical service of God the deacon is the priest's assistant (not therefore his personal servant!), it follows inevitably that in the parish he is subordinate to the parish priest. At the same time scope remains for him to undertake responsibilities of his own, especially when he practises these by reason of some specialized knowledge which the parish priest does not possess to the same degree. At times he may find that his position as parish priest's helper and supporter involves somewhat severe sacrifices, especially when he himself is fairly advanced in years. On both sides inadequacies and human weaknesses have to be allowed for. But self-effacement and humble service cheerfully

undertaken are the deacon's characteristic virtues. If he really consecrates himself to the task it will be a source of copious graces to him. Moreover limits must be defined from the first by ecclesiastical legislation for both sides. It must guard against the possibility of the deacon becoming too officious in various ways, and at the same time against the parish priest encroaching on the deacon's rights. Where friction does arise, it must be put up with. In any case it is no reason for not reviving the diaconate. Between priests too friction can arise, and especially between parish priest and curate: in cases where the latter is living independently and is not a member of his parish priest's household this is particularly frequent. Such friction can *even* arise between the respective housekeepers!

But when the parish priest and the deacon work together with genuine good will, then an exceedingly beautiful personal relationship between the two can be achieved. Who could forget the classic words of farewell which Laurence the deacon threw after his bishop, pope Sixtus, as the latter was being led away to martyrdom? 'Where art thou going, father, without thy son? Whither dost thou hasten, reverend priest, without thy deacon? Never hast thou offered the holy sacrifice without thy deacon. How have I displeased thee, my father? Let us put it to the proof today whether thou hast chosen thee a worthy deacon! He to whom thou hast so often entrusted the giving of the Lord's blood in holy communion, thy co-helper in the celebration of the sacrament, to him wilt thou deny to become thy companion in the offering of thine own blood?' Incidentally such a relationship still exists today. It is to be found between the missionary and his 'shadow catechist', the *catechista pedisequus*. This catechist accompanies him on his long journeys through the mission district, and is constantly at hand to render him personal service (for under such circumstances this too is necessary). In addition, he instructs the children and prepares for the celebration of mass, etc. Such a fatherly or brotherly relationship between parish priest and deacon cannot fail to bring abundant blessings on the parish. And it should not be difficult to build up such a relationship—always provided it springs from the altar and is rooted in prayer. The priest and deacon could say a certain amount of the divine office in common. The parish priest would be grateful to the deacon, feeling himself released from a burden, and finding that he had time to devote

himself to prayer and meditation, time to prepare his sermons, time to hear confessions, time to distribute holy communion without hurrying. Would not that be a genuine contribution to parish priest and parish community alike? Certainly it would depend in great measure on the parish priest whether the people of the parish had easy access to the deacon. (I refer to the new institution of the office as well as to the person.) When he evinces the degree of trust which is due to his fellow-labourer in God's vineyard, the people too will come to regard their deacon with an attitude of confidence.

The cleric is taken from the people of God to belong in a special way to God. Unfortunately it has turned out in the course of history that the priest, for various reasons, is not only taken from but isolated from the people. In the sphere of human relations a broad gulf has opened up between priest and people. The deacon would find it easy to keep in contact with the people. Like the rest he is married, like the rest he has family cares on his shoulders, like the rest he will, once his liturgical functions are over, have a part to play in lay life. Indeed the part-time deacon has a worldly occupation like the rest of the faithful. Thus the deacon will have access to men with whom the priest has either no contact at all, or at most only indirect contact. Just as his wife and children can pave the way for him (the deacon) to reach the members of the parish, so he in turn can be the means of bringing the parish priest into contact with his parish children, especially with the 'border-line' Christians. If the deacon genuinely strives to live up to his vocation, he can in many cases be a bridge between priest and parishioner, and between priest and parish community as a whole. In the liturgy of the eastern Church he already fulfils this role of bridge, and in the liturgy of the west he could fulfil it. When he makes visits in the parish, he comes as God's consecrated minister. It is the Church that comes in his person. That could not be said in the same sense of the visit of a lay person. What has been said of the deacon here is no less true in its degree of those ordained to the lower orders. They too are the fastenings that hold the whole together. Thus one is no longer presented with the alternative of *either* priest *or* layman, but with a whole organically developed structure. And as an organic whole the parish community, enriched as it is with new degrees of order, will take on new life. In theory the revival of the offices might lead to a strengthening of

clericalism, but in view of what has been said there need be no anxiety on that score. In spite of his order, the deacon belongs too unmistakably to the lay side for this, and would be regarded definitely as one of the other lay people, especially the part-time deacon, but the whole-time one too. That in the case of the latter a certain danger of officialism exists cannot be gainsaid. But exactly the same is true of the priest. And it will be the duty of priest and deacon alike to wage a life-long battle against themselves, so as to let the charismatic source of their state prevail over automatism, routine and narrowness. It has already been pointed out that priest and deacon alike are ordained from a common source of grace.

Deacon and family

The apostolate is directed more and more towards the family. In point of fact it is precisely here that we find the best points of contact for an apostolate that penetrates to the roots. Here are laid the life-long foundations of the children's religion and of their faithfulness to God.

The deacon will as a rule be married. Thus he will have to care for his family. Certainly this entails a greater financial burden for the Church, which must provide for her deacons. Should not the dioceses and parishes collaborate to ensure that the family receives adequate means of support? Admittedly a family lays responsibilities on the deacon of a kind which preclude him from devoting his undivided energies to his vocation. But this difficulty too should not be exaggerated. Is not the holder of other official positions often obliged, when he takes his work in full earnest, to put his professional duties before his family? Does this not apply to the doctor—especially to the country doctor? And have not the married priests of the eastern uniate Church stood manfully staunch and loyal, in many cases—as ordained ministers of that Church have informed me—encouraged by their wives to sacrifice and even to martyrdom? While the deacon's family may and does involve a certain restriction on his activities, one must also have regard to the positive aspects of the situation.

The deacon, together with his family, must be an example to the parish not only of married and family life, but also in his attitude towards material goods, in faithfulness to his vocation, etc. Often he and his family will occupy roughly the same position

in the community that in the old days used to be held by the family of the staunchly Catholic school teacher. (It need scarcely be added that it is not easy to have to give good example when one is continually in the eye of the parish, and it requires genuine humility to live continually and even unconsciously for the edification of others.) For this reason it will be essential for the deacon to find a suitable wife, one who will stand by him with understanding and sympathy in the work of his vocation, and who can assist him in certain fields. In Evangelical circles the question of the deacon's wife was taken very seriously. The selection committee for deacons accepted as a rule only unengaged applicants. These could then be guided to have due regard to their vocation in their choice of a wife. Later the wives and future wives of deacons were given special preparatory courses to give them too the right spirit for their task.

That the deacon, as I have already said, is far less separated from the faithful than the priest, he owes primarily to the fact that he is a family man. The priest too comes of a Christian family. He too is familiar with the life, knows its joys and sorrows, its insecurities, its economic needs, the difficulties of educating children. But the deacon has something more than this. He has the knowledge from his own personal experience of happiness and want; there is a direct bond between him and other men who have the same difficulties, cares and needs, precisely because he is personally familiar with this side of life. This cannot fail to be an asset to him in his apostolic work and to some extent in his parish visiting. As a married man, as well as by his specialized knowledge of social problems, he will often achieve a deeper insight into the situation of the family than the parish priest. Where co-operation is good, the parish priest too will have the benefit of this. The bond between the deacon and the parish affects these and similar aspects of the community life, and as I have already said, must have its effect in the proclamation of the word.

If the priest's celibacy is a sacrifice, the lay Christian's marriage, when this is lived sacramentally, is often just as great a one. Thus the deacon too, if he is to give a good example of married life to the parish, will have a not unsubstantial sacrifice to make. His income, always very limited, will be the cause of considerable restrictions to him as the number of his children grows. But this

sacrifice will bear fruit not only for the deacon's family but for the parish too. The deacon should also be equipped to give, at any rate in co-operation with the parish priest, a (supplementary) course of instructions on marriage. In view of the emphasis we lay nowadays on preparation for marriage, the value of this assistance should not be under-estimated. Regarded from this point of view, the deacon's marriage will be thought of not as a concession on the part of the Church, but as an exalted task, and at the same time as the mobilization of fresh energies from those whom God has endowed with priestly qualities and dispositions, yet without calling them to celibacy. That this is and always has been the case, a glance at the Church's early history and at the eastern Church will show. The priest who offers sacrifice will willingly renounce marriage and family for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and of the flock entrusted to him. At the same time the bond between the sacraments of order (in the first degree) and of marriage, which is achieved in the person of the deacon, will be an abundant source of grace for the salvation of the deacon and his family as well as for that of the parish.

Did the letter quoted at the beginning of this article¹ claim too much? I believe it has been shown in this survey that the renewal of the diaconate would be able to bring new life and energy to the parish and to the Church. And while many who evinced an inclination for the priesthood (and really would have had a vocation to it!) may finally decide to become deacons, so we must hope that on the other hand numerous priests will come forward from the families of the deacons.

God give the Church courage for the experiment, and strength, no doubt after many preliminary ponderings, to renew the ecclesiastical offices and especially the diaconate!

¹ See *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* for October.



ST KATHARINE OF EGYPT

MARY SHARP

MUCH of our knowledge about Katharine springs from legend, but legends are nearly always based on truths, and if the facts available are doubtful and few, the stories about her tell something of her virtues, of her character,