

HOMILY – DEACONATE OF PAWEL RATAJCZAK
(Acts 6:1-7b; Ps 117:1,2; Mt 5:13-16)

Centuries ago, Socrates said “To be is to do.” Some centuries later, Sartre said, “To do is to be.” In our own time, Frank Sinatra sang, “Wo Be Do Be Do!” Not too long ago, one of our own wise men, Fr. James Fiori, stated at an Oblate conference, “We are human beings, not human do-ings!”

Today, on the occasion of this ordination to the diaconate, the Word of God is asking Pawel, and us, to balance being and doing in our lives. In short, to BE an evangelizer, and then GO OUT and teach all nations.

True, the readings ask us to DO a lot: to distribute food to the needy; to pray; to serve the Word; to go out to the whole world and tell the Good News; and to let our light shine before others.

But first, we are asked to BE in very specific ways: to *be* prayerful; to *be* full of the Spirit; to *be* wise; to *be* full of faith; to *be* salt of the earth and to *be* light to the world.

This is not incidental. There is deep wisdom found in these readings. We are sent to evangelize the whole world, yes, but first we must be evangelized ourselves, truly immersed in the love of God and God’s word.

To my mind, it is clear that we as Oblates are called to be active contemplatives. We speak of Apostolic Communities. In a sense, community is a large part of our apostolate today. That I believe is the key to evangelization. We experience the love of our God first in prayer, in family and in community, then we reach out to share that love with others.

Christians are like bananas, we grow in bunches. God is Trinitarian, family, relational, intimacy and oneness. It is in prayer and in community that we meet and experience that relational God – a community that is marked by deep trust, sharing, openness, and faith in one another, even daring to strive for a degree of intimacy that feeds the soul.

So Pawel, live the gospel proclaimed today - strive first of all to be salt that flavors all of life; to be light to the world, and then go out and evangelize.

“You are the salt of the earth.” Salt loses its saltiness not by some chemical miracle, but by becoming so impure, so mixed with other elements that it loses its function. To stay salty is to stay single-minded, focused on God’s love for us and spreading that love in the world. Salt does not exist for itself, nor do the disciples; their life is turned outward, to the world. Be that kind of salt.

“You are the light of the world.” It is interesting that we need light to see, but we cannot see light. It is only a prism, or a rainbow, that breaks light into its various hues; that allows us a glimpse into the mystery of light. In a similar fashion, human beings hunger to see God, yet cannot see God. We need prisms, rainbows, people of prayer and community who will give us a glimpse into the mystery of God because of their intimacy with God and with others. Be that kind of prism, as an Oblate and now as a deacon.

I am confident that Pawel is ready to be an evangelizer. We were privileged to have him spend some months with us as the Cree Nation Oblate community. He was able to enter into our lifestyle that included first of all striving to experience the love of God in our love for one another. We would walk around the medicine wheel on occasion, sharing physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and even daring to share our struggle with the divine fire of our Eros, our human sexuality. That was a very life-giving experience for us all and I am grateful for his willingness to share who he was with us.

I would like to share one example of the power of evangelization. Viola is a First Nations person from Saskatchewan who was raised by her grandparents, and given away to an older man at the age of fourteen, though a marriage never took place. He was alcoholic, and very abusive to her and their children. Finally, after he had taken a gun and a knife to her, she left him.

One day he verbally abused her over the phone. Formerly, such an incident would have thrown her into total confusion. Her recent involvement with the church, however, had changed her. She took the CLC, Cursillo, and a year long lay leadership program. She had learned to “communicate with love” based on the teachings of Jesus in Mt 18:15 (“If your brother wrongs you, go to him alone *and tell him how you feel*”) and Mt 5:44 (“Love your enemies”). So instead of acting out of anger, she chose to write a letter to her ex-partner describing what he had said, and expressing her feelings of hurt and anger in a positive manner, with love. Then she went with her daughter to deliver the letter to him at a meeting he was attending.

His reaction upon reading the letter was to stand there, open mouthed and speechless, then he said simply “Okay” and returned to the meeting. Her daughter said with awe in her voice, “Mom.” She had never seen her mother relate to her dad in this way before. Returning home, Viola was filled with a mysterious joy. Sorting out her emotions with me on the phone afterwards, she realized what she had done - she had loved her enemy, had communicated with love, she had lived the gospel, had actually forgiven him in the process and was free from anger and resentment.

With excitement, I pointed out that she was experiencing the signs that Jesus told the disciples would accompany them, in Mark 16:17-18: In writing that letter, she had picked up a poisonous snake and it did not harm her; in delivering the letter, she drank deadly poison, and it did not hurt her. In expressing her hurt with love, she was speaking a new language so effectively that her daughter noticed it and marveled at her. She was truly a disciple who was experiencing the reign of God and the power of the resurrection in her life.

This incident is to me a living out of what Pope Paul VI expressed so well in EMV # 80: “Let us therefore preserve our fervor of spirit. Let us preserve the delighting and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles (like Thomas) and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers (like our founder) all through the Church’s history - an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good news ... from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.”

The Eucharist we share tonight allows us once again to touch the mystery of God’s love that transforms us and missions us. We are bathed in the Word and privileged to commune with the Body and Blood of Jesus. We are in a sense, sacramentally evangelized, then missioned, sent out to share that Good News with the world.

So let us take to heart the message of the readings tonight: seek to balance in our own lives, being and doing. In short, to BE evangelizers, and then to GO OUT and teach all nations.

Responding to this call from God, this man, Pawel, your relative and friend, is now to be raised to the order of deacons. Consider carefully the ministry to which he is to be promoted.

He will draw strength from the gift of the Holy Spirit. He will help the bishop and his body of priests as a minister of the word, of the altar, and of charity. He will make himself a servant to all. As a minister of the altar he will proclaim the Gospel, prepare the sacrifice, and give the Lord’s Body and Blood to the community of believers.

It will also be his duty, at the bishop’s discretion, to bring God’s word to believer and unbeliever alike, to preside over public prayer, to baptize, to assist at marriages and bless them, to give viaticum to the dying and to lead the rites of burial. Once he is consecrated by the laying on of hands that comes to us from the apostles and is bound more closely to the altar, he will perform works of charity in the name of the bishop or the pastor. From the way he goes about these duties, may you recognize him as a disciple of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served.

My son, you are being raised to the order of deacons. The Lord has set an example for you to follow.

As a deacon you will serve Jesus Christ, who was known among his disciples as the one who served others. Do the will of God generously. Serve God and humankind in love and joy. Look upon all un-chastity and avarice as worship of false gods; for no one can serve two masters.

Like the men the apostles chose for works of charity you should be a man of good reputation, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Show before God and humankind that you are above every suspicion of blame, a true minister of Christ and of God's mysteries, a man firmly rooted in faith. Never turn away from the hope which the Gospel offers; now you must not only listen to God's word but also preach it. Hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. Express in action what you proclaim by word of mouth. Then the people of Christ, brought to life by the Spirit, will be an offering God accepts. Finally, on the last day, when you go to meet the Lord, you will hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter in the joy of the Lord."