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Retreat for the Permanent Deacons of the Diocese of Phoenix and Their Wives  
“Pope Francis and the Missionary Transformation of the Church and the Diaconate”  
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## Pope Francis and the Missionary Transformation of the Church and the Diaconate

- Preface
  - It’s a great joy to be here with you in Scottsdale as we enter into retreat together, when Jesus says to us what he said to the apostles after they had done and taught so much on one of their missions that they didn’t have time even to eat, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while,” and he took them on a boat with him away from the crowds. Well, the Franciscan Renewal Center isn’t exactly one of Peter’s fishing vessels, but it will do. Elsewhere Jesus would teach them and us how he seeks to give us the rest we need, telling us, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” We find the rest and refreshment we need from yoking ourselves to Jesus, from responding to his invitation to unite ourselves more to him and learn from him on the inside his meekness and humility, so that no matter what challenges we’re facing personally or pastorally, we know that we’re facing them with him. Every retreat is an opportunity for us to yoke ourselves anew to the Lord Jesus, to the power of his resurrection living in us from within, raising us from the dead.
  - The theme of this retreat will be “The Missionary Metamorphosis of the Church: Pope Francis, the Reform of the Church and the Reform of the Diaconate.” Tonight, we’ll have a chance to introduce the theme. Tomorrow we’ll talk about mercy, charity and the Eucharist within that renewal and on Sunday we’ll ponder Pope Francis’ attempt to revolutionize our preaching as part of that renewal.
- How to live a good retreat
  - Last year, I was on Long Island preaching a retreat to about 70 college seminarians. Because of the audience, at the beginning of the retreat I gave them some principles on how to make a retreat well because I knew that for some of them it was the first lengthy retreat they had ever made. I was surprised that after that conference two of the priests on faculty told me that they, too, found those basic orientations a helpful reminder to them as well, because over the course of time they had begun to look at retreats a little bit more as a time for “rest and relaxation” in general than the particular type of rest Christ wants to give us by yoking us to him. So, for whatever it’s worth, I’d like to share a few of those principles.
  - A retreat is a time fundamentally of prayer, and persevering prayer, because sometimes with all the rest we’re doing, we don’t have as much of a chance as we’d like — and as God would like — for time to listen to him and open up. Persevering prayer is hard work. It requires a commitment. Some days prayer may be easy, full of consolation. Other days our prayer will be as arid as the desert on the way to Tucson. But the key is to keep going, to fight off distractions by uniting ourselves with the Lord.
  - To receive these graces, God wants our free cooperation. That requires preparation. Parable of the Sower and Seed. Four types of soil, all found in priests and deacons and lay people:
    - Hardened soil of the one already set firmly in his ways, or of the know-it-all or of the inveterate sinner
    - Superficial soil of the one who is looking to be entertained and fight off boredom, but the one who’s not really interested in a deep change of life, who doesn’t want the seed to go to the core of his being. Seed will get scorched as soon as a pleasant or unpleasant distraction arises.

- Thorny soil. Worldly cares and anxieties, lure of riches and pleasures. Definitely chokes the word. Clergy are not immune from these types of thorns. We need to throw our cares on the Lord. We need to place the treasure of our heart in him.
- Good soil. Bears fruit. Not just “some” fruit, but abundant fruit, 30, 60 or 100 fold. One seed of the Lord well planted ought to be able to change our life in 30 or 100 ways or more. That’s the power of the word of God. Received with faith the size of a mustard seed, it can translate the Catskill mountain range.
- Pope Francis, on whose words and work this retreat will be based, commented on this parable back in June at daily Mass that to bear fruit we need to be prepared (June 8, 2013):
  - What does it mean to guard the Word of God? It means “opening our hearts” to the Word, “as the earth opens to the seed”. Some seeds scatter and “are eaten by birds,” and this happens when the Word is not guarded. It means that some hearts “do not know how to receive it”. Sometimes the seed falls “on earth with many rocks and the seed cannot take root and dies.” That is, they are not capable of guardianship because they are inconstant. “The Word can also fall on unprepared ground”, he added, “where there are thorns and in the end it dies” because “it is not guarded”. But what are these thorns? Jesus says it is our “attachment to wealth, vice”. To guard the Word is to receive it, but we must “prepare our hearts to receive it. Meditate on what the Word tells us today, watching what happens in life.” This is what Mary did, ... she pondered these events. Here lies the task for Christians: to welcome the Word of God and to think about what it means today.
- So we need to prepare our hearts for what the Lord wants to do in us during these days.
- For this to happen, we need to talk about a few things.
  - Conferences and Homilies
    - I’d encourage you to take notes if it will help you to retain the material and nourish your prayer. Eventually I’m going to put up my outlines for the conferences as well as audio recordings on catholicpreaching.com, so don’t think you have to get it all down. We’ll be collating and covering a great deal of Pope Francis’ pre-papal and papal writings, homilies, speeches, and other sources — way too much for anyone to keep up with, but I’ll provide them all to you for further prayer and study. I’d encourage you to take down the phrases, the words, in which you know that the Lord is speaking directly to your heart, when he’s encouraging you, when he’s calling you to conversion. Then after the conferences, you can continue your conversation with the Lord about those things in prayer.
    - We’ll talk over the course of this retreat on what Pope Francis says about sacred preaching. He says the point is to invigorate that covenantal dialogue with the Lord. It’s supposed to start it, or reignite it, or strengthen it. Try to leave with one or a few points to continue the conversation going, focusing on how the Lord wants to help you bear fruit from that word.
  - Interior Silence
    - We’re not going to bear good fruit if we’re giving it to thorns or to superficiality.
    - Ponder the medicinal punishment of Zechariah. To help him become more like Mary.
    - Mary’s heart. Putting together and treasuring things in her heart.
    - So at a practical level, I’m going to invite you to try to keep some reverential silence during this retreat, not just external but internal. This is to open our ears to hear the Lord speak to us in gentle breezes. Be respectful that others are having a conversation. We all know that in ministry, not to mention for you in familial life, we’re constantly being interrupted. A retreat is a chance for a lengthy, far less interrupted conversation with the Lord. Be jealous of this time just with Him. We need to cultivate this habit of silence if we’re ever going to be contemplatives on the street. For those of you who are here with your spouses, I’m not saying that you

need to give each other the silent treatment, but I would encourage you to talk to try to keep your conversation during this time focused on the Lord, what the Lord is saying to you, what you're saying to him. Likewise, when you're with your brother deacons and their wives whom perhaps you haven't seen for a while, keep the listening to the Lord alive. Share some of the spiritual fruits. There will be plenty of time when the retreat's done to talk about other things, be it March madness, plans for the spring, and other items. If you are tempted just to catch up on small talk, I'd encourage you to take it as a sign that you should probably make some extra time over the course of normal day to day life to stay in better touch, rather than to use this time. Be jealous of the opportunity a retreat gives for the Lord, and know that especially during this retreat, he'll be jealous of your time as well.

- I'm going to invite you, as much as you can, to leave the world behind until Sunday afternoon. Shut off your cell phone if you can or only check it to see if you've gotten emergency calls. Don't access the web or the news. If you use your phone or your Tablet to pray, put it on airport mode.
- We're in an age in which it's increasingly hard for people to be silent. We're supposed to be teachers of that silence and if we can't do it for 41 hours, we're never going to help our people by our example.
  - Confession
    - A retreat is always a time of conversion and a recommitment to God and to the holiness he wants of us and wants to give us. Because it's a time of conversion, on every retreat we should go to confession, but that's not enough. Pray for the grace to make the best confession of your life. Get it all out. Hide nothing. I'd encourage you to make a general confession since your last retreat; a general confession is one where we really look to the roots of our sins are, the idols we have, the compromises, the places we're making peace with. A general confession, as you know, doesn't have to be long. It can still be done in about five minutes with greater preparation. Perhaps you can examine on the seven capital sins, or the beatitudes, or the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
- The Missionary Metamorphosis of the Church
  - Just over two years ago, I was summoned to Rome to do color commentary with Raymond Arroyo for EWTN's coverage of the conclave that elected Pope Francis. His brother Cardinals elected him, as both they and he have stated on multiple occasions, to reform the Church. Three days after the white smoke rose, he joked with us media representatives that some had suggested he take the name Hadrian, after Hadrian VI, the Pope who tried to reform the Church's central administration after the scandals that led to the Protestant Reformation. Instead he took the name of the greatest reformer in Church history, Francis of Assisi, who was the Lord's instrument to rebuild his dilapidated Church as a whole, one living stone at a time.
  - The chief corruption in the Church, Cardinal Bergoglio declared to his brother cardinals during their pre-conclave meetings, has nothing to do with banks, or butlers, or bumbling bureaucracies. It occurs when the Church becomes self-referential and spiritually worldly, "living within herself, of herself and for herself." The fundamental reform the Church needed, he continued, was to remember that she does not have a mission, but is a mission. Unless she's coming out of herself to bring Christ and his light to those who are living in darkness on the outskirts of life, she's simply sick.
  - We saw this corruption among the apostles who on several occasions began to focus on jockeying for position in an earthly kingdom they presumed Jesus had come to inaugurate rather than on denying themselves, picking up their cross and follow Jesus to all those on the periphery.
  - We've seen it throughout Church history when some have fought more for benefices and sinecures or cushy assignments than for the towel to wash others' feet.
  - We see it in segments of the Church bureaucracy — from chanceries to the Roman Curia — when priests, prelates, deacons and others use their positions to try to advance their own "careers" or the

careers of friends.

- And we see it in Church institutions — dioceses, parishes, schools, hospitals, charities — that begin to focus all of their efforts on those who are already coming, rather than getting outside of themselves to serve all those for whom Jesus gave his life.
- Cardinal Bergoglio told the Cardinals what the Church most needed in a new leader. The “next pope” had to be a “man who, from the contemplation and adoration of Jesus Christ, helps the Church to go out of herself to the existential peripheries, who helps her to be a fruitful mother living off the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.” Not only did the Cardinals think their colleague from Buenos Aires fulfilled those criteria but that papal job description aptly summarizes what Pope Francis has been trying to accomplish since his election.
- In his programmatic apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel,” the object of our prayer during these days, Pope Francis expressed his hopes for the missionary metamorphosis of the Church that he’s been seeking to catalyze. “I dream of a ...missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures, can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”
- The reform he has been begun of the Curia — with the help of various new advisory councils, commissions and consultants — intends to align the Church’s central infrastructure to support and advance the mission that is the Church rather than frustrate it by structures more apt for previous centuries. But this is a reform that he wants to go far beyond the Vatican walls. He wants it to reach every Catholic. To be a disciple at all, he writes in his exhortation, is to be a “missionary disciple.” Francis wants each believer to say with him, “I am a mission on this earth; this is the reason why I am here.” And as the whole world has been observing, Pope Francis is convinced that the reason why he was elected, why he is here, is to carry out that “sweet and comforting” task of evangelization. He has been a personification of the missionary reform of the Church, not just catechizing but *showing* everyone what a missionary disciple is and does.
- The Holy Father is also giving by word and example what he thinks is a description of the priests, deacons and lay faithful Christ needs today, those who from his own prayerful contemplation and worship of the Lord will help lead the Church out of herself to bring Christ and his healing, his passionate warmth, his truth to others, rather than waiting for the world to come to him.
- “It’s key that we Catholics, both clergy and laity, go out to meet the people,” he stressed in the 2010 book-length interview, *El Jesuita*. This is “not only because the Church’s mission is to announce the Gospel, but because failing to do so harms us. ... A Church that limits herself to administering parish work, that lives enclosed within a community, experiences what someone in prison does: physical and mental atrophy.” A Church that merely protects its small flock, that gives all or most of its attention to its faithful clientele, he believes, “is a Church that is sick.”
- He wants to help the entire Church, beginning with the clergy, to recover its full health, by yoking ourselves to the Divine Physician as he goes out to the peripheries to make house calls to every lost sheep.
- For this transformation to occur, each of us needs to be transformed. To be a disciple at all, he writes in this exhortation, is to be a “missionary disciple.” Francis wants each believer to say with him, “I am a mission on this earth; this is the reason why I am here.” And this happens by each of our encountering Christ in such a way that not only do we tell him that he is the Messiah and Son of the Living God but are bursting with a desire to share that Good News with others.
- Francis says in EG 264 that the primary reason for evangelizing is the love and salvation of Jesus that we have received, urging us to greater love of him. “What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?” (265) Evangelization responds to that expectation. “We have a treasure of life and love that cannot deceive, and a message that cannot mislead or disappoint.” Evangelization comes from our being “convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to ... We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in

everything. This is why we evangelize.” If we’ve really encountered Jesus, then we can’t but share him. We remember the experience of Saints Andrew when he first met Jesus. He ran to bring news of him to his brother Simon, who became the first pope. We remember when Jesus met the woman at the well in Samaria. She ran to tell all the people in Sychar. We remember what happened when Jesus revealed himself to the disciples in Emmaus. They ran uphill seven miles in darkness to share the news of his resurrection with the other disciples. Once we truly encounter Christ, once we grasp who he is, how he loves us, how he accompanies us, we can’t keep him to ourselves. We must share him.

- The sad fact is, however, that many Catholics have not had this experience. Some Christians’ lives, Pope Francis said, “seem like Lent without Easter.” He said Christians “must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” World won’t hear “dejected, discouraged, impatient, anxious” evangelizers but those whose lives glow with fervor and Christian joy, the fervor and joy that comes from encountering the Lord. Pope Francis adds, ““We have a treasure of life and love that cannot deceive, and a message that cannot mislead or disappoint.” It ennobles us and is never out of date. This infinite love cures our infinite sadness.” This (renewed) encounter alone can free us from self-absorption and God and bring us beyond ourselves to full truth of who we are. This inspires our evangelization. “If we have received the love that restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (8).
- For us to share that joy, however, we must first have it. In a homily on Dec 6, 2013, Pope Francis observed that, while we are accustomed to think of Jesus preaching, healing, walking through the streets speaking to people, or even being raised upon the Cross, “we are not accustomed to think of Jesus smiling, or joyful”. However, he said, “Jesus was full of joy.” We ought to ponder Jesus’ joy and his desire to share the love of the Father with others.
- To be truly alive in faith requires encountering Christ and bringing others to encounter him.
- (Catechists, Sept 27) The heart of a catechist always beats with this systolic and diastolic movement: union with Christ – encounter with others. Both of these: I am one with Jesus and I go forth to encounter others. If one of these movements is missing, the heart no longer beats, it can no longer live. The heart of the catechist receives the gift of the kerygma, and in turn offers it to others as a gift. ... The catechist is conscious of having received a gift, the gift of faith, and he or she then gives that gift in turn to others. This is something beautiful. We don’t keep a percentage for ourselves! Whatever we receive, we give!
- Deacons in the Evangelizing Mission of the Church
  - This message of Pope Francis isn’t new. It’s as old as the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, but it is something that he needs to profess anew because we really haven’t been living it across the board as adequately as Christ wants.
  - In this Missionary Transformation of the Church, there is a crucial role for deacons. Even though Deacons were ordained fundamentally to help out with the crucial work of charity in the early Church — which was as essential to the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments — among the first seven deacons, the two we know about more than their names were both powerful and effective preachers. St. Stephen summarized all of salvation history in his witness before the Sanhedrin, scribes, Pharisees, and someone from Tarsus named Saul, who would eventually echo what St. Stephen said. St. Philip the Deacon helped to explain how Isaiah’s prophecies of the Suffering Servant applied to Jesus so powerfully that an Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized immediately on the spot. The importance of deacons in spreading the faith and making disciples cannot be overstated.
  - The Directory on the Life and Ministry of Deacons teaches about the deacon’s role in the mission, by all the say and do.
    - 23. The bishop, during the rite of ordination, gives the book of the Gospels to the deacon saying: “Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become”. Like priests, deacons are commended to all by their conduct, their preaching of the mystery of Christ, by transmitting Christian doctrine and by devoting attention to the problems of our time. The principal function of the deacon, therefore, is to collaborate with the bishop and the priests in the exercise of a ministry that is not of their own wisdom but of the word of God, calling

all to conversion and holiness. He prepares for such a ministry by careful study of Sacred Scripture, of Tradition, of the liturgy and of the life of the Church. Moreover, in interpreting and applying the sacred deposit, the deacon is obliged to be directed by the Magisterium of those who are “witnesses of divine and Catholic truth,” the Roman Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him, so as to teach and propose the mystery of Christ fully and faithfully. It is also necessary that he learn the art of communicating the faith effectively and integrally to contemporary man, in diverse cultural circumstances and stages of life.

- 26. Contemporary society requires a new evangelization that demands a greater and more generous effort on the part of ordained ministers. Deacons, “nourished by prayer and above all by love of the Eucharist”, in addition to their involvement in diocesan and parochial programs of catechesis, of evangelization and of preparation for the reception of the Sacraments, should strive to transmit the word in their professional lives, either explicitly or merely by their active presence in places where public opinion is formed and ethical norms are applied — such as the social services or organizations promoting the rights of the family or life. They should also be aware of the great possibilities for the ministry of the word in the area of religious and moral instruction in schools, in Catholic and civil universities and by adequate use of modern means of social communication
- The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States says:
  - The deacon participates as an evangelizer and teacher in the Church’s mission of heralding the word. In the liturgy of the word, especially in the Eucharist or in those liturgies where he is the presiding minister, the deacon proclaims the Gospel. He may preach by virtue of ordination and in accord with the requirements of Canon Law. Other forms of the deacon’s participation in the Church’s ministry of the word include catechetical instruction; religious formation of candidates and families preparing for the reception of the sacraments; leadership roles in retreats, evangelization, and renewal programs; outreach to alienated Catholics; and counseling and spiritual direction, to the extent that he is properly trained. The deacon also strives to “transmit the word in [his] professional [life] either explicitly or merely by [his] active presence in places where public opinion is formed and ethical norms are applied.”
  - In these and many other formal and informal ways, the deacon leads the community to reflect on their communion and mission in Jesus Christ, especially impelling the community of believers to live lives of service. Because the deacon sacramentalizes service, he should proclaim the word in such a way that he first witnesses its empowerment in his own life. Then he can effectively challenge others to practice the Church’s ministry of charity and justice in the social environments in which people live their baptismal vocation. By his own faithful practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the deacon “by word and example . . . should work so that all the faithful, in imitation of Christ, may place themselves at the constant service of their brothers and sisters.
  - As a participant in the Church’s ministry of the word, the deacon heeds the charge given him at ordination: “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” The deacon must always remain a student of God’s word, for only when the word is deeply rooted in his own life can he bring that word to others. The deacon ought to remember that since he is a member of the hierarchy, his actions and public pronouncements involve the Church and its Magisterium.
- Stages of the formation of Missionary Discipleship
  - The greatest pastoral achievement of Cardinal Bergoglio before his election to the papacy was the Aparecida document from 2007.
  - Cardinal Bergoglio was the chairman of the team of CELAM bishops to put together the 2007

concluding document of the Aparecida Conference, the fifth General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, which is one of the most significant documents ever published by the Church. It's the master plan for the New Evangelization in Latin America. But it also gives crucial insights for forming evangelized evangelizers, "missionary disciples in communion," anywhere. It's key for the formation of deacons first as disciples and then as apostles.

- It said that there were five stages in this formation, something we should ponder as we begin this retreat and think about in terms of passing the faith on to kids and grandkids, students, friends and others.
  - *The Encounter with Jesus Christ:* Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him (cf. Jn 1:38), but it is the Lord who calls them: "Follow me" (Mk 1:14; Mt 9:9). The deeper meaning of the search must be discovered, and the encounter with Christ that leads to Christian initiation must be fostered. This encounter must be constantly renewed by personal testimony, proclamation of the *kerygma*, and the missionary action of the community. The *kerygma* is not simply a stage, but the leitmotiv of a process that culminates in the maturity of the disciple of Jesus Christ. Without the *kerygma*, the other aspects of this process are condemned to sterility, with hearts not truly converted to the Lord. Only out of the *kerygma* does the possibility of a true Christian initiation occur. Hence, the Church should have it present in all its actions
  - *Conversion:* It is the initial response of those who have listened to the Lord in wonder, who believe in Him through the action of the Spirit, and who decide to be His friend and go with him, changing how they think and live, accepting the cross of Christ, conscious that dying to sin is attaining life. In Baptism and the sacrament of Reconciliation Christ's Redemption is actualized for us.
  - *Discipleship:* The person constantly matures in knowledge, love, and following of Jesus the master, and delves deeper into the mystery of His person, his example, and his teaching. Ongoing catechesis and sacramental life are of fundamental importance for this stage; they strengthen initial conversion, and enable missionary disciples to persevere in Christian life and mission in the midst of the world that challenges them.
  - *Communion:* There can be no Christian life except in community: in families, parishes, communities of consecrated life, base communities, other small communities, and movements. Like the early Christians who met in community, the disciples take part in the life of the Church, and in the encounter with brothers and sisters, living the love of Christ in solidarity, in fraternal life. They are also accompanied and encouraged by the community and its shepherds as they mature in the life of the Spirit.
  - *Mission:* As they get to know and love their Lord, disciples experience the need to share with others their joy at being sent, at going to the world to proclaim Jesus Christ, dead and risen, to make real the love and service in the person of the neediest, in short, to build the Kingdom of God. Mission is inseparable from discipleship, and hence it must not be understood as a stage subsequent to formation, although it is carried out in different ways, depending on one's own vocation and on the moment in human and Christian maturation at which the person stands.

- Conclusion

- We finish with some thoughts with which Pope Francis finished World Youth Day in Brazil in July 2013, which are a fitting summary of everything we've been pondering tonight at the beginning of this retreat and something that points to the type of fruit that Jesus would like to bear 30, 60, 100-fold or more as this retreat ends.
- (WYD July 28) The experience of this **encounter [with Christ]** must not remain locked up in your life or in the small group of your parish, your movement, or your community. That would be like withholding oxygen from a flame that was burning strongly. Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on, so that everyone may know, love and confess Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history (cf. Rom 10:9) Careful, though! Jesus did not say: "Go, if you would like to, if you have the time", but he said: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the

whole Church, and that includes you; but it is a command that is born not from a desire for domination, from the desire for power, but from the force of love, from the fact that Jesus first came into our midst and did not give us just a part of himself, but he gave us the whole of himself, he gave his life in order to save us and to show us the love and mercy of God. Jesus does not treat us as slaves, but as people who are free, as friends, as brothers and sisters; and he not only sends us, he accompanies us, he is always beside us in our mission of love. Where does Jesus send us? There are no borders, no limits: he sends us to everyone. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. It is not only for those who seem closer to us, more receptive, more welcoming. It is for everyone. Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all, he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love.

- Let's ask the Lord to fill us with that warmth so that we can, like they did, go out with him to bring the fire of his love to all those we meet and light the world ablaze!