

There was a time in our diocese when, if a priest was scheduled to leave a parish after his six or twelve year term, the parish would send a letter to the bishop describing the type of priest they wanted - I am told that some of these letters were quite unrealistic. One priest jokingly said that Jesus Himself couldn't have fulfilled these requests

In the first reading we hear about growing pains - Christianity started out at a subgroup of Judaism - but it quickly became apparent in the first couple of years that God intended the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be shared and believed by non-Jews - the Greek speaking Christians were called Hellenists

The Hellenists complained that their widows were not be treated the same as the Jewish widows - and they were right to speak out - they were being discriminated against

The Twelve Apostles (remember Judas was replaced by Matthias) met with other disciples - with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles created the diaconate

Initially seven men were chosen to be deacons - the most famous is Stephen, who would become the first Christian to be martyred for his Christian faith - the Apostles, the first bishops, laid hands on them and conferred upon the office of deacon - the deacon is a lower order of clergy - it is a smaller participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ

There is only one diaconate - the diaconate of Jesus Christ - however, there are two categories based on the future - there is the permanent diaconate - these men are often married and have no intention, at least in the near future, of going on to become priests - then there is the transitional diaconate - as the name suggests, they are in transition - these transitional deacons are on their way to becoming priests - the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church states that men are to be transitional deacons for at least 6 months before they are ordained priests - mine, which is often the case our time, was almost a year long

In this first reading we see a division of labor - the Twelve Apostles, the first priests and bishops, felt their first priorities were to preach and study the Word of God and to celebrate Mass, to serve at table

The deacons' first priority is to serve - the word deacon comes from Greek and means "servant" - here the deacons serve the widows and the poor in the early Christian communities - the first priority of a deacon is to directly serve the people of God

A priest's first priorities are to preaching and studying the Word of God and to celebrate Mass - this doesn't mean he doesn't also serve the people directly - this is especially true in communities were there are no deacons

A deacon's first priority is to serve the people directly - this doesn't mean he doesn't also study and preach the Word - deacons, along with priests and bishops, are the only ones who can read the Gospel and give a homily at Mass

This division of labor allowed the early Christian Church to flourish and be built up even more

In the second reading St. Peter talks about just that - the building up of the Church - Jesus is the cornerstone rejected by the initial builders

Even though we don't all participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ as head of the Body of Christ, we all participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ as Body of Christ, as a stone in the Church

We, the Church, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who belong to God - why? - so that we can announce the praises of Jesus Christ

Why do we announce praises of Jesus Christ? - because He called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light  
Christianity isn't some rose-colored lenses that we see the world through that makes everything look better than it is - faith and reason are not at odds - faith allows us to reason better - faith allows us to see reality as it truly is  
How many of us have had a radical experience of Jesus Christ and His love for us? - if you have, you know what I'm talking about - we saw things more clearly after our encounter with Jesus' love for us  
Those of you who are married or seriously dating someone - do you remember when you first started falling in love? - the sunsets were more beautiful - the morning coffee had more flavor - the grass was greener - the food we ate had more flavor - the thing is, none of these things changed - we were the ones who changed - through the lens of love, we started to appreciate these things for what they are - we began to see them more for what they objectively are  
It is this love of Jesus Christ that calls us to participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and allows us to be a heavenly holy nation - it is also this exchange of love that calls us out of darkness and into His wonderful light which illuminate things as they truly are  
Ask Jesus for the gift of opening our hearts even more to His love  
Why do we need to know Jesus' love, to bathe in the His wonderful light? - because we live in a fallen world - we live a world of pain and disappointment - people and things rarely live up to our expectations of them - and yet we must love anyways  
Also, to be fair, we often don't live up to the expectations others have of us - we are all fallen, sinful human beings - Jesus conquered sin and death on the Cross - have you allowed Him to battle the sin in your heart?  
This is why we must not just have the theological virtue of love, but also the theological virtues of faith and hope  
I know I've quoted it often, but still, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus." - St. Pope John Paul II, pray for us  
This is true, but only if we let it - it may seem endless - it may seem fruitless - it may seem useless - but we must not give up the fight against evil, especially within ourselves - in Jesus Christ, we are conquerors - in Jesus Christ, we have faith and hope  
Jesus has prepared a place for us in God the Father's house - but are we going to go to the house? - are we going to take up residence there? - is the Father's house going to be the address of our hearts?  
How do we get there? the ultimate GPS, Jesus Christ Himself - Jesus declares to His disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life."  
Jesus is in the God the Father and God the Father is in Jesus - thus if we know Jesus, we know God the Father  
We are all in this together - we all have our roles to play in building up the Kingdom of God, the dwelling places in the Father's house - no matter what our vocation may be: priest, deacon, religious sister or brother, lay person; have faith in Jesus Christ - trust in Him - allow Jesus' light to shine so that you and others may come out of the darkness of our weaknesses and failures and into His wonderful light  
Jesus has prepared a place for us in the Father's house - follow Jesus to the Father's house for He is the way and the truth and the life