

# Introduction

Lord, teach us to pray . . .

—Luke 11:1

Years ago, I met a man who had just started the deacon aspirancy program in his diocese. He was completing his first semester of formation, and I asked him how it was going.

“I love it,” he told me enthusiastically. “But you know what’s been really challenging?” He seemed almost embarrassed to bring it up, but then added, sheepishly, “Praying.” “Praying?” I asked. He explained. “I’ve always been a guy who does things. I’m used to being busy, doing things, praying with my hands, you know? What I do is my way of praying. But I’ve had to learn how to pray another way.” I think most deacons can understand exactly what he means.

The diaconate, by its very nature, is a ministry of doing. Deacons are rarely still. The deacon is the guy who teaches, preaches, arranges, carries, facilitates, sets up, and takes down. He’s perpetually shuttling between the parish and his home, his home and his job. His days are

packed with deadlines to meet, classes to prepare, sick people to visit, meetings to attend, questions to answer, phone calls to return, and homilies to write. A parishioner once put it this way: “You know what the deacon is? You’re sort of like the priest’s helper.” Well, yeah. Sort of.

But our place, our role in the Church, is so much more than that. The deacon is, fundamentally, one who serves; he is configured at ordination to Christ the Servant, and so he serves in a particular way the People of God and, through that, God himself. At any parish, he is usually in the thick of things. So it is only natural that those men who like to keep busy—who don’t like to have idle hands—are attracted to this vocation.

But there are so many moments in the deacon’s life when the best way for him to use his hands, and to use them to serve, is simply to fold them in prayer. This book is for those moments.

Throughout this little book, you will find opportunities for prayer that I hope are particularly helpful to your diaconal vocation—such as a prayer before chanting the *Exsultet* or a Rosary composed especially for deacons. But there are also prayers in this book that can be used by other people for different circumstances and occasions. The possibilities and purposes for prayer, after all, are boundless. It is my intent that these short prayers can be useful to almost anyone seeking to pin down their hopes, aspirations, doubts, and joys—and then somehow

put them into words. At the end of the book, you will find space for writing out prayer intentions and notes.

St. Philip Neri once wrote, “It is an old custom of the servants of God to have some little prayers ready and to be frequently darting them up to Heaven during the day, lifting their minds to God out of the mire of this world. He who adopts this plan will obtain great fruits with little pain.” Maybe, just maybe, some of the words in this book can help today’s “servants of God” out of the “mire of this world.”

I also think this collection of prayers might be especially timely. In early 2020, when the world confronted the coronavirus pandemic and churches everywhere were shuttered and ministries more or less suspended, I heard from a number of deacons who, in the first days of the crisis, seemed at a loss. “How can we minister to people if we can’t see them, visit them?” they asked. “What can we do?”

Some deacons started recording or live-streaming reflections; others did short videos of the Liturgy of the Hours and posted them on social media. Others started working the phones, trying to contact parishioners to at least say hello and let them know they were remembered. But one deacon asked in frustration, “Shouldn’t we be doing more?”

My answer then is my answer now: Maybe we need to do less. Maybe we need to refocus our energies and

just be. Maybe God is asking us to work less and contemplate more, to busy ourselves with prayer. It's easy to forget that despite what the world may think (or what our pastors may believe), we who have consecrated our lives to God are more than functionaries. I've often said this during retreats and at convocations: Being a deacon isn't just about what you do. It's about who you are. And who we are draws inspiration and strength from our devotion to the Lord we love and from our desire to serve him however we can, whenever we can. And that means, above all, striving to be men of prayer.

My hope, my prayer, is that this book will help make that easier, directing our hearts to the great work of evangelization and service that lies at the root of this beautiful vocation. Lest we forget: it is work that we literally hold in our hands.

**Deacon Greg Kandra**

**April 25, 2020**

**Feast of St. Mark, Evangelist**

I.

# Prayers for Daily Life

Let's face it: every day has its hills and valleys—and at times we can do little more than just pray. The deacon marks his day with the Liturgy of the Hours—bookending it with Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. But there are often other moments in life that feel as though they need their *own* set of psalms.

Very often, simply living the routine of daily life can be a kind of prayer itself, a canticle of bewilderment, anxiety, or hope. The writer Anne Lamott has famously written that she thinks the two most popular prayers are “Help, help, help!” and “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Those pretty much sum up the human condition, don't they?

But there are some moments in life that cry out for more, moments that can lift our hearts or bring us to our knees. We all live them. We all survive them. We feel the

need to turn to God and say, “Got a minute? I need to get something off my chest.”

We all try to pray our way through these moments. For a deacon, these times are opportunities to remember the complicated, challenging two worlds in which we live—the secular and the sacred—and to seek God’s help in bringing them together.

So, we pray. We pray for patience, for persistence, for resilience. We pray to make it through another day. We pray that we remain close to God and that he remains ever near to us.

## **To Begin My Day**

Good morning, God of creation.  
Thank you for creating one more day,  
one more chance to serve, to inspire, to hope.  
Help me to rise like the sun,  
to bring light and warmth and possibility  
to so many who experience only darkness and despair.  
Gracious Father,  
Fill my heart with humility and love,  
so that I may never forget that  
I have been shaped from dust  
and that my service to you began not in triumph,  
but lying on the ground, facing the earth,  
praying for the saints to pray for me.  
I pray to them again this morning  
and pray to you with wonder and trust and joy.  
Good God,  
I am your pencil, your brush, your hands.  
I am your servant.  
Guide me in your ways  
and use me as you will.  
This day is yours, and so am I.  
Amen.

## **Prayer before Work**

My Lord God,  
As I prepare for another day of work,  
come and work beside me.  
Guide my hand, focus my heart, direct my thoughts,  
to continue your creation throughout the world.  
May I always remember that I serve you and others  
by the work I do.  
Give me a patient and joyful heart  
to praise you, even when I grow weary,  
and to give thanks, even if I feel overburdened.  
Help me to seek you in everything,  
and to watch for opportunities to serve others.  
May my words and my work always point to you.  
I offer this prayer, as I offer all things,  
through your Son, Jesus,  
who worked beside a carpenter,  
who walked among fishermen,  
and whose own life's work  
led to the salvation of the world.  
Amen.



## **Prayer before Assisting at Mass**

Lord,

As I prepare to serve at your altar,  
to serve your priest and your people,  
guide my thoughts and actions only toward you.

As I vest, I put on Christ, and the armor of my vocation.

The alb reminds me of Baptism,  
the beginning of my life of faith.

Cleanse my heart this day and make me new!

The stole, borne on my shoulder and crossing my heart,  
reminds me of the Cross you bore for me  
and the love I bear for you.

The dalmatic, robe of charity,  
clothes me in the charism of my calling.

Entering your holy sanctuary,  
may I walk behind you in joy,  
beside you in patience, before you in humility,  
doing all for you and with you  
so that I may assist at this Mass as if it were my first,  
my last, my only one.

Amen.

## **Prayer of Thanksgiving after Mass**

Generous God,

Thank you.

Thank you for the privilege of serving at your altar,  
the gift of being only inches away from bread and wine  
becoming the Body and Blood of Christ.

Thank you for the gift of bearing witness to your love.

May I never weary of being there for you,  
and always stand ready to serve.

May I always count this as one of the blessings of my life,  
an honor that humbles me and gives glory to you.

In serving at your altar, help me to also serve the poor,  
the hungry, the lonely, and those forgotten.

May I take from this moment of wonder and gratitude  
your grace to carry out your Gospel into the world,  
bearing with me your light and your love.

Amen.

## **Prayer at Midday**

Lord God,  
At the middle of my day,  
I pause to whisper a word of thanks.  
Thank you for being by my side  
and offering me reassurance and hope.  
God of time, who lives beyond time,  
help me to make the most of each day.  
May I make every moment an offering,  
and every act and word a kind of service,  
for I am your servant, O Lord,  
and my hands and heart belong to you.  
I pray this, as I pray all things,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.