

In a spirit of service and obedience to his Bishop -- who had been definitively taken from his people -- Lawrence, as Deacon, would guide the Church for three days, and for the last time would administer the goods of the Bride of Christ. This he would do in a manner which, in itself, would have significance. It would show how, in the Church, everything is oriented and consummated by values which begin with charity and with realities which are destined to remain, even when this world has passed away. For those who look on this reality from the outside or merely superficially, all this seems exclusively bound up with material needs and with the present. It would appear solely to be no more than the distribution of material goods to the poor. In reality, however, Lawrence's act, done in a spirit of fidelity to the office entrusted to him by the Bishop and by ecclesial ministry, propels him and the entire Church entrusted to him until his own martyrdom, beyond history into an eschatological dimension - the "time" and "space" in which God manifests the fullness of his charity and love.

Thus, Lawrence, an ordained minister of charity, brings to completion the task given to him. This he does not only by following his Bishop in the shedding of his own blood in martyrdom, but also in his act of distributing the communities resources (as expressed in material goods) to the poor. His gesture shows how, in the Church, all things have a value once oriented towards charity, or when placed at the service of charity or when they can be transformed into charity...

Finally, the institution of the permanent diaconate represents, and is a sign of an important enrichment for the Church and her mission, especially in the light of the Holy Father's continued appeals for new evangelization at the dawn of the third Christian Millennium. The beauty, power and the heroism of Deacons such as Lawrence help us to discover and come to a deeper meaning of the special nature of the diaconal ministry.

PRAYER TO SAINT LAWRENCE

O glorious Saint Lawrence, Martyr and Deacon,
who, being subjected to the most bitter torments,
didst not lose thy faith nor thy constancy in confessing Jesus Christ,
obtain in like manner for us such an active and solid faith,
that we shall never be ashamed to be true followers of Jesus Christ,
and fervent Christians in word and in deed.

Amen.

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Saint Lawrence

Proto-Deacon of the Roman Church

Feast Day: August 10

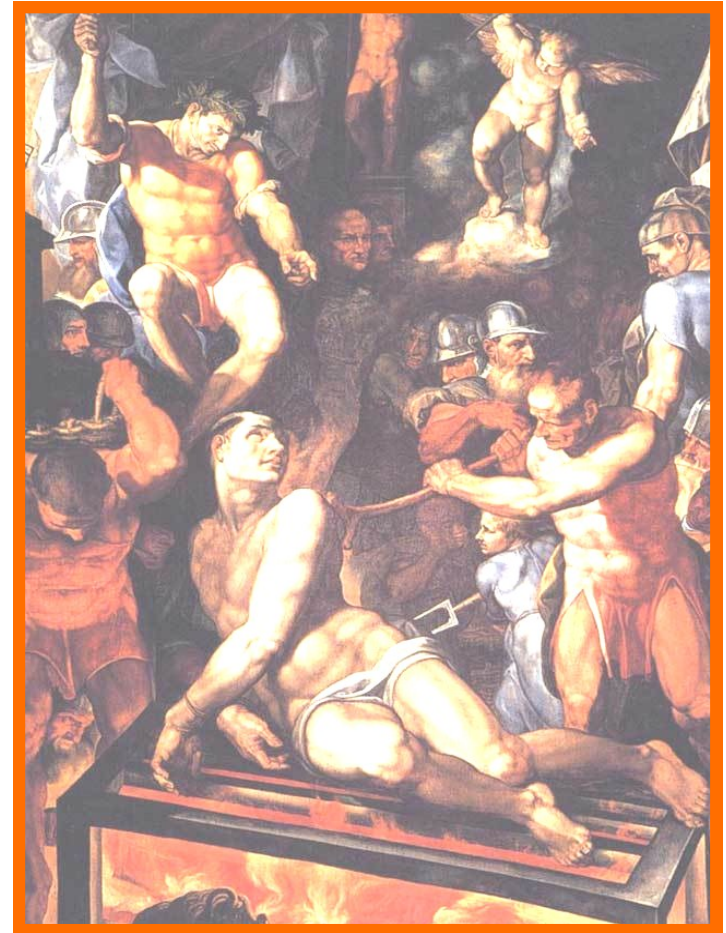


Image of St. Lawrence

being roasted to death on a gridiron.

Saint Lawrence-Proto-Deacon of the Roman Church

by: Fr. Francesco Moraglia

Professor of Dogmatic Theology-Vatican City, Italy

*The history of the Church has transmitted to us several accounts of the great Bishops and priests who have illuminated the profound mystery of the ordained ministry at a pastoral and theological level...The ministry of Deacons also becomes more clear when seen in the light of the great deacons of the Church's history. An example is St Lawrence, Martyr and Proto-Deacon of the Roman Church. Together with St Stephen and St Philip, Lawrence must certainly be one of the most renowned Deacons of antiquity. In the West, the diaconate, considered as a permanent ministry in itself, and not just oriented towards the Priesthood, was less frequent by the fifth century. Up to that time it had been a flourishing institution but by the beginning of the fifth century, largely because of greater involvement of priests in the pastoral ministry, the first grade of Holy Orders was largely reduced to the role of an access to the successive grade of the Priesthood...

The personal adventures of Lawrence, Proto Deacon of the Roman Church, come down to us through an ancient tradition, already widely known by the fourth century. This tradition, accepted by the Church, is also to be found in the liturgical texts. The most notable events of Lawrence's life are described particularly well in the *Passio Polychromi* of which we have three versions (dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries)... In our efforts to amplify the few details of Lawrence's life, let us begin with those preserved for the feast of his Martyrdom (10 August) in the *Depositio Martyrum* which dates from 354 AD. According to the *Roman Missal* "Lawrence, the renowned Deacon of the Roman Church, confirmed his service of charity by martyrdom under Valerian (258), four days after the decapitation of Pope Sixtus II... he patiently sustained a terrible martyrdom on the grid-iron, having distributed the goods of the community to the poor whom he regarded as the true treasure of the Church"...

Lawrence is believed to have been born in Spain, at Osca, a town in Aragon, near the foot of the Pyrenees. As a youth he was sent to Saragoza to complete his humanistic and theological studies. It was here that he first encountered the future Pope Sixtus II, who was of Greek origin. He was a teacher in what was then one of the most renowned centers of learning. The future Pope was one of the most famous and esteemed teachers.

Lawrence, would subsequently become the head of the deacons of the Roman

Church, was remarkable for his human qualities, his subtlety of mind and for his intelligence. Between master and disciple a communion of life and friendship grew. With the passage of time a love for Rome, the center of Christianity and seat of the Vicar of Christ was consolidated and grew stronger in both. Eventually, following a migratory wave which was then very pronounced, both left Spain for the City where the Apostle Peter had established his See and given supreme witness. Thus Master and disciple were able to realize their ideal of evangelization and missionary activity to the point of shedding their blood, in Rome, the heart of Christianity. Sixtus was raised to the Chair of Peter and began a pontificate that would last for less than a year. Without hesitation, he desired to have Lawrence, his friend and disciple, at his side so as to entrust to him the important office of proto-deacon. Both sealed their life of communion and friendship by dying at the hands of the same persecutor, a few days apart from each other...

In his *De Officiis* St Ambrose gives us an account of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence. He dwells on the encounter and dialogue of Lawrence and Sixtus. He alludes to the distribution of the Church's goods to the poor and ends by mentioning the grid-iron, the instrument of Lawrence's torture and the phrase which Lawrence addressed to his torturers: "assum est... versa et manduca" ("This side is done, turn and eat")... There was a contest between Sixtus and Lawrence as to who would be the first to die for Christ. When Sixtus was martyred, Lawrence cried because he had survived Sixtus...

Ambrose's account of the martyrdom of Lawrence portrays Lawrence as one who, in virtue of the Sacrament received, is totally dedicated to the service of charity in the specific context of third century Imperial Rome, in the throws of violent persecution. In this situation, Lawrence is called to concrete action before the ecclesial community and before the world. These actions would be transformed into signs of God's love and charity, from which all things derive and to which all things return. By this service the Deacon expresses the characteristic ministry of his diaconia which consists in the service of charity, in accord with a sacramental mandate. His is an animation which affects the Church or areas of Catholic life which is truly catholic in character (katalon= the totality without exclusion). His service aspires to the totality of mankind without exception. Its content is a good which responds to all the expectations of man's soul, mind and body. It eschews all partiality and interest groups...