

Homily based on the readings from September 16, 2025 (1 Timothy 3.1-13; Luke 7.11-17)

It is an interesting coincidence how the readings at daily Mass often line up with the specific saints who are being commemorated. Today, of course, is the memorial of two martyred bishops from the third century – Cyprian, bishop of the North African city of Carthage, and Cornelius, the 21st Bishop of Rome. As it happens, our first reading was almost entirely devoted to describing the qualities that are required for being a bishop – for example, he must be “temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle.” Saint Paul even dedicates a few lines to the ideal characteristics of a deacon. (Oddly enough, he says nothing about priests, but we will let that pass.) In any event, it would be difficult to imagine a reading that is *more* suitable to the particular pair of saints we are memorializing today.

Another noteworthy coincidence, although perhaps a bit less obvious, is a reading that appears in the Liturgy of the Hours. For a couple of

weeks, in fact, we are making our way through a sermon by Saint Augustine entitled “On Pastors.” Although Augustine goes into greater detail, his basic themes are similar to the points articulated by Saint Paul. He is highly critical of shepherds – that is, members of the clergy – “who want to have the title of shepherd without wanting to fulfill a pastor’s duties.” In other words, he is cautioning us against ministers who are attracted to the prestige and privileges of the office, rather than a life of selfless service. He makes another important point a bit later in the letter: “I am a Christian,” he says, “for my own sake.” On the other hand, he tells his congregation, “I am a leader [that is, a clergyman] for *your* sake; the fact that I am a Christian is to my own advantage, but I am a leader for your advantage.”

This sentence immediately calls to mind a particular paragraph from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so.

Unlike Baptism or Confirmation, which we receive for our *own* well-being, these two sacraments – which are commonly known as the *Sacraments of Service* – are entirely devoted to the benefit of *others*. Even though many people think of them as being mutually exclusive, Ordination and Marriage are actually *complementary* – in that they both entail a lifelong, indissoluble commitment to *ministry*. The reason the Church is so hesitant to allow people to receive both sacraments is not because the responsibilities are so *different*, but because they are so *similar*.

Even though Saint Paul and Saint Augustine are explicitly writing about ordained ministry, much of what they say would be equally applicable to matrimony. Anyone who desires the superficial benefits of marriage, without accepting the corresponding obligations, is making a *mockery* of

the matrimonial covenant. That is just as grave a failure as a pastor being greedy, angry, selfish, and lazy. Even though we all have different roles within the Body of Christ – husband or wife, deacon or priest, bishop or martyr – each of us has a solemn obligation to commit ourselves fully to the ministries with which we have been entrusted. Every single one of us has people who are *depending* on us to make Christ present to them. That is a grave responsibility for anyone to bear, but that is precisely why all of us are here right now – to partake of the grace, the mercy, and the peace of Jesus Christ.