

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Priesthood Ordination

Priesthood Ordination

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

June 22, 2019

No Mere Human Honor

It is truly a joy to ordain these three deacons – Matt DeFusco, Matt Himes, and Tyler Kline – to the holy priesthood. I thank all of you gathered here this morning to share in this day of joy and grace, a day of blessing for our entire local Church, the Archdiocese of Baltimore. And while it is a most honorable thing to be ordained a priest, our joy today does not focus on the bestowal of an honor. Rather, we rejoice and give thanks because the Lord has touched their hearts— calling them to the priesthood and eliciting from them a generous response of love... a calling and a response which we, as a community of faith, have ratified.

With a true sense of wonder and awe we now await that sacred moment, when, by the prayer of the Church, the laying on of hands, and the anointing, the Holy Spirit will invade the hearts of these men anew, there to fashion permanently in their souls the living image of Jesus Christ – Christ the priest, Christ the shepherd, Christ the head and spouse of His Church... By priestly ordination, they will be enabled to do for us the things that Christ did when he walked upon the earth: preach the Word of God far and wide ... to believers and non-believers alike; heal us of spiritual infirmity; call us to holiness and to our proper vocation; provide for us the banquet of Christ's Sacrifice, His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. As priests, they will accompany us on our life's journey, comfort us in sorrow, rejoice in our blessings, challenge us in our weakness, leading us all the while to participate ever more deeply in Christ's sacrificial love for us, the people redeemed by his Blood. No, it is not a mere human honor that brings us together and fills us with joy. What fills us with joy is the Spirit of the Risen Lord, at work in our midst, "doing immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20-21).

Leadership

And so, my dear brothers, so soon to be ordained: Moments ago, when your names were called, you answered “Present!” By that word you didn’t merely indicate that you managed to get to the church on time. Rather, you indicated your radical availability for set plan and purpose of God; your readiness to engage in the divine mission of spreading the Gospel; your eagerness to serve God’s people by Word and Sacrament... in a word, your fitness to exercise a particular form of leadership in the Church. To be sure, you are being placed at the forefront of the Church, not to occupy a place of honor, but rather to lead by serving and to serve by leading.

Indeed, the Scripture readings you’ve chosen for today speak of three qualities that must characterize the leadership you’ve been called to exercise: first, courageous leadership; second, humble leadership; and last but not least, confidence-inspiring leadership.

The First Quality Is Courageous Leadership

Not all leaders are at first willing to lead. For example, Jeremiah resisted the Lord’s call to leadership. Called to be a prophet, he protests that he is too young and unable to speak for God. Many of us priests have the opposite lament: we are getting too old! So together with my brother priests, I repeat to you, dear brothers, what God said in response to Jeremiah’s protest: ‘Say not, you are too young!’ You are indeed young and a lot of experience awaits you in the priesthood. But today, the Lord extends his hand, touches your lips and places his Word not only on your mouth but also in your heart. That is why you will be able to go where you are sent and to teach and preach the Gospel with love and integrity. That is why, in spite of your youth, you go forth, not with human boldness, but with parrhesia, that boldness of speech that flows from the Holy Spirit.

Relying on the Lord as your strength, you must be bold and courageous leaders who are unafraid to advance the Church’s mission of evangelization, even in the face of obstacles and headwinds, as always there will be. But in your courage, do not lose your youthfulness. Remain young in the Lord, young in your enthusiasm, young in your generosity. It is a beautiful thing when a priest reaches his advancing years with even a greater degree of priestly joy and zeal than he had on his ordination day.

The Second Quality Is Humble Leadership

To grasp this quality, let's turn to today's responsorial psalm which speaks of David. The Psalmist echoes what God said when he chose David to lead his people: "I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him... " (Ps. 89:21). Apart from Moses, no leader in the Old Testament was greater than David, a mighty warrior with the heart of a poet – but also a flawed and sinful human being. If you don't believe me, just ask Uriah the Hittite! David was a strong leader but he was also a man of deep and humble repentance.

God raised up David just as he raises you up; God anointed David just as he anoints you – not to make of you a warrior – but rather so that, as priests, 'his faithfulness and mercy may be with you' (Ps. 89:27). If you want to be that strong, loving, priest whose heart never grows old, then follow David's example of humble repentance in your own life. Find your joy, your strength, and your security in the Lord's merciful love, the mercy you both receive and dispense in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sensing daily your own need for forgiveness and mercy, you, as priests, will rejoice to be those ambassadors, agents, and ministers of the Lord's merciful and reconciling love, a spirit of forgiveness so utterly needed in a world torn by strife and dissension, in a Church in need of healing.

The Third Quality Is Confidence - Inspiring Leadership

Much has been written and said about leaders who inspire confidence and, dear brothers, that is precisely the kind of leader you are called to be. The confidence that you are to inspire, however, does not revolve around yourselves. It has nothing to do with bravura performances or personality cults. It has everything to do with being the kind of priest who inspires others to put their trust in the Lord, and to do so by leading them into the heart of the Paschal Mystery, that is to say, the saving Death and Resurrection of Christ. And the way we lead others into the heart of this mystery is by dying to ourselves, and to our interests, ambitions, and desires: "Amen, amen, I say you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies it produces much fruit."

It is by giving your lives for others that you inspire them to stay close to the Eucharistic Lord; to grow in intimacy with the Lord and the Church; or maybe to

return to the Lord and his Church after an absence. It is by laying down your lives for others – generously and without counting the cost – that your preaching of the Word and your celebration of the Eucharist bears fruit in the lives of the people to whom you are being sent. You must therefore have in your hearts that faith which moves mountains and that love which transforms hearts (cf. Pastor John Paul Warren).

‘May the love of Christ impel you each day to live, not for yourselves, but rather for him, who for our sakes died and was raised’ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14).

Conclusion

Courageous leadership; humble leadership; confidence-inspiring leadership: in a word you are called to be priests after the mind and heart of Christ. May Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of Priests pray for you, so that day by day you may grow in likeness to her Son. And may God bless you and keep you always in his love!