

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Ordination of Kevin Ewing to the Priesthood

*Priesthood Ordination/Solemnity of the Birth of St. John the Baptist
Cathedral of Mary Our Queen
June 24, 2017*

Dear friends, we've gathered in joy to pray with and for Deacon Kevin Ewing as today he is ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Today's ordination takes place on the Solemnity of the Birth of St. John the Baptist and so we ask this great saint not only to intercede for us but also to help us reflect on the beautiful mystery about to unfold before our eyes. Please listen and pray as, in the spirit of St. John the Baptist, I offer a few words of instruction and encouragement to Deacon Kevin, now on the cusp of priestly ordination.

And so, now, Deacon Kevin, what does this great feast of John the Baptist's birth say to you and to us all in this grace-filled moment? Might I begin with Isaiah where the prophet says this of himself and of John the Baptist: "The Lord called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name." And again, "For now, the Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant in my mother's womb"

What Isaiah says of himself and of John the Baptist can be said of you, Kevin. For all of us, the path to the priesthood can be long and winding, but it has led you and the Church to the happy conclusion that from the first moment of your existence God has called you to be his follower, to be a member of his Holy People, *and* to be a priest. This is the conviction that undergirds the promises you will make today to serve the Church faithfully and lovingly, as a priest, all the days of your life. May the Lord who formed you and called you, bless you each moment of every day.

Yet, when you think of the varied demands of the priesthood and the challenging pastoral situations you will face day after day and year upon year, you are right to wonder if the Lord has not entrusted you with a mission impossible. After all, Moses

and the prophets keenly felt the weight of their mission. Even the Lord experienced anguish in the Garden before accomplishing our salvation. And every good priest recognizes his inadequacy for the mission entrusted to him. Every good priest knows that the holiness of the priesthood far outstrips his own.

So, what to do? Where might we look for guidance and encouragement this morning? May I suggest we turn our gaze to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin and the mother of John the Baptist. In the midst of what must have been a difficult pregnancy, Elizabeth welcomed Mary, the Mother of the Lord, at the entrance of her home. In a phrase, Elizabeth welcomed Mary who brought her Jesus and the infant in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy. In that moment, the luminous vocation of Mary, Elizabeth, and John shone forth and was captured in Mary's thankful hymn of praise, the Magnificat.

If you would daily embrace your priestly vocation and mission, Kevin, then you, like Elizabeth, must allow the Church - whose model is Mary - to bring Jesus to your doorstep, to the entry way of your heart. This happens as you pray the Liturgy of the Hours, meditate on the Gospels, avail yourself of spiritual direction and sacramental confession, celebrate the mysteries of salvation with reverence and love, and encounter Christ in those you serve, most especially the poor and vulnerable. In this way, the Lord will arrive each day at the entry way of your inmost being to nourish and strengthen you to be a priest after his own heart. When the Lord arrives, let your heart leap for joy, just as John leapt for joy.

Among your most formidable tasks is proclaiming the living Word of God. You have prepared well for this task by a sound seminary formation yet, as you have been taught, the charge of proclaiming God's Word is more than a matter of content and technique. Rather, as John's father, Zechariah, demonstrates, it is first and foremost a matter of loving adherence to every word that comes from the mouth of God. When approached by the angel in the temple as he went about his high priestly duties and was told that his wife, Elizabeth, was to have a son in her advancing years, Zechariah was incredulous, just as you and I can sometimes be incredulous when confronted with the demands of the Gospel and the demands of ministry. For his incredulity and resistance, Zechariah's power of speech was taken from him. It was only when Zechariah acceded to God's will in faith by naming his son, not for himself

but according to God's counsels, that his tongue was loosened and he spoke the praises of God.

Key to preaching the Gospel with courage and love is our daily conversion as priests, our striving for personal holiness. When our lives are attuned in all respects to the saving will of God the Father, then our tongue is loosened; then we preach with the credibility of a living witness, and our proclamation bears the good fruit of the Gospel.

And the good fruit of the Gospel is measured not by personal success or acclaim but rather by the extent to which our preaching leads others to encounter Christ. Like John the Baptist, it will be your mission to herald the coming of the Savior, to help people make a path for the Lord in the highways and byways of their hearts, so that as individuals and communities they can encounter the Lord – and in encountering the Lord encounter others, including fellow parishioners, family, friends, enemies, the poor and the vulnerable.

Like John you will call people to repentance and newness of life but unlike John you will probably not baptize Jesus in the waters of the Jordan! Rather, you *will* baptize many in the name and power of Jesus, bringing alive in those you baptize his death and resurrection, and inserting them into the life of the Trinity upon which the Church is modeled. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you will minister to the wounds of our existence, helping those you serve to repair their relationship with God and the Church, bringing pardon, forgiveness, peace, and joy. Like John, you will proclaim the Lamb of God but more than that, in the Mass you will be the instrument of his true presence as you offer the very sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world . . . his saving death and resurrection. Let the Eucharist be the center of your priestly life, its source and summit, the *raison d'être* of your life and ministry.

Even as celebrate today the birth of John the Baptist, the liturgy also references his greatest act of witness to Christ, viz., his martyrdom. There is no vocation worthy of the name that does not entail at least some measure of suffering meant to bear witness to the crucified Lord and make no mistake, Kevin, in your life as a priest, the Cross will assert itself. Yet it is in the crucible of suffering that love, especially

pastoral charity, is perfected. It is in the crucible of suffering that our hearts learn to love like Christ's own heart, in this crucible that we decrease so that Christ might increase!

Reflecting on John the Baptist, Jesus says, in the Gospel of Matthew, "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women, there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet, the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." Called from your mother's womb to be a priest, may you aspire to the true greatness of that Kingdom where Christ our High Priest lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen.