

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Priesthood Ordination

Priesthood Ordination Homily

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland

June 23, 2018

Dear brothers, so soon to be ordained:

Almost all of Pope Francis' writings include the word "joy" in their title: "The Joy of the Gospel," "The Joy of Love," "Rejoice and Be Glad."

So too, joy is the hallmark of this, the day of your priestly ordination, a day when the whole of our local Church of Baltimore is suffused with gladness.

This joy is written on the face of your parents and family members. It is a joy deeply felt by those who were responsible for your formation; a happiness experienced by your classmates, friends, and those about to become your brother priests.

This hope and joy is etched in the hearts of parishioners those you already know and those whom you will soon be serving.

For me, your bishop, no day is happier than this!

Of course, the day of ordination and the day of your first Mass do not last forever! Rather, the intense joy and excitement of these days must give way to a more permanent joy, a lasting joy, a beatitude that endures in thick and thin.

I would suggest that today's Scripture readings and the Rite of Ordination both offer three paths to living of the priesthood joyfully and fruitfully. With that in mind, let us reflect on what we have heard and on what we are about to do.

The first path to priestly joy is companionship in ministry.

The reading from the Book of Numbers tells of Moses' clearheaded assessment that alone he could not bear the burdens of leading and ministering to God's people.

Following the Lord's instruction and the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Moses gathered the seventy elders at the meeting tent. There the Lord spoke through Moses and through him bestowed his Spirit upon them.

The elders began to prophesy, to speak in God's name, and banded together, they helped Moses to accomplish the mission the Lord had entrusted to him.

Let us consider the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen as our meeting tent. And while there are three of you instead of seventy, nonetheless, through the prayer of the Church, the laying on of hands, and the anointing, I will impart to you the Holy Spirit in whose transforming power you will be enabled to speak and act in the very person of Christ, Head, Shepherd, Spouse and Servant of the Church.

You will repeat and reenact the Lord's saving words and deeds, as you proclaim the Word, celebrate Holy Mass, baptize, forgive sins, witness marriages, anoint the sick and prepare many to meet the Lord at the end of their lives. You are to be instruments of Christ's love, bringing joy and hope to many.

None of this will you do simply on your own. You are united to me, your bishop, to whom you pledge your obedience, but you are also united in a special bond of love with your brother priests.

Today you are pledging your readiness and your resolve to unite with me and them in accomplishing the mission that the Lord has given to this local Church, spreading the Gospel far and wide, making disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit, recognizing and utilizing the gifts that the Spirit distributes among the people of God, and drawing people in every corner of the archdiocese into the mystery of God's love.

When we try to accomplish this mission on our own, it is too great a burden, too great a challenge for any of us.

When we do it together, in a union of prayer, friendship, and cooperation, we find, not only the support that we need, but also the joy that will sustain us when we encounter the inevitable headwinds of ministry.

St. Paul in Second Corinthians shows us the second path to enduring priestly joy,

namely, the joy of a clear conscience, that is to say, the joy of living the priesthood with a deep and personal integrity that comes, not from ourselves but from the Lord working in us and through us.

Given his history of persecuting the Church, St. Paul was keenly aware that his ministry was not a right that he earned but rather a gift that God in his mercy bestowed upon him, a treasure that he held in the earthen vessel of his humanity.

And for that reason, even in the midst of many different trials, St. Paul could say “we are not discouraged” – that is – “we remain steadfast and joyful.”

Paul’s ministry began when he encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus. From that moment, the light of God’s glory shining on the face of the Risen One shone in the heart of St. Paul and was reflected in his energetic ministry as also his sufferings.

In the strength of God’s mercy, Paul continually renounced in his own life and ministry dishonorable deeds and deceitful words such that he could commend himself to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God and thus proclaim not himself but Christ with openness and joy.

In a word, Paul’s life was an open book and if you wish to have enduring priestly joy and fruitfulness in ministry, your lives also must be an open book, marked by transparency and deep inner integrity.

The way to such integrity for you, for me, and for us all is sound spiritual direction and the worthy and frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

A bishop friend of mine of many years, who died recently, once was asked why he was always so happy, why he never seemed to be discouraged.

“I guess,” he said, “it’s because I go to confession every two weeks. If God loves me so much that he forgives my sins, what’s there to be sad about?”

My brothers, with the support and love of your bishops and brother priests, as well as good lay friends and co-workers, may you always know the joy of a clear conscience in your life and ministry.

The third and final path to enduring priestly joy is pastoral charity, a self-sacrificing love for the people whom you will serve, modeled on the Good Shepherd and rooted in your love for Jesus and your discipleship.

Notice how this truth emerges in today's Gospel reading where the Risen Lord encounters Peter who had betrayed him three times.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, undid Peter's three-fold betrayal by asking him three times, "Do you love me more than these?"

Contrite of heart, Peter answered three times, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Each time the Lord responded, "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," "Feed my sheep."

Jesus concluded this poignant dialogue with the words, "Follow me"- "Be my disciple."

If you wish to be joyful priests whose ministries bear the enduring fruit of the Gospel, then spend time each day in prayer, meditating on the Word of God, spend time each day in prayer, encountering the Risen Lord.

Let him search the inmost chamber of your heart and ask, "Do you love me?"

Do not be distressed if he asks you one, two or three times.

Allow the Good Shepherd to form your hearts anew each day in love so that, like him, you will be willing to lay down your lives, to give of yourselves, for the people who are entrusted to your pastoral care, especially the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, the disconnected.

In your solidarity with the Good Shepherd, never fail to love the flock of God of which you are both a member and a shepherd.

Three paths to priestly joy: companionship in ministry, a clear conscience, pastoral love.

Dear brothers, on the cusp of your priestly ordination, I commend you to Mary, the

Mother of Jesus, The Cause of Our Joy!

May she who is our Mother in the Order of Grace guide you and pray for you all the days of your lives!

Click here for full coverage of the ordination, including a story, video and photos.