

# Celebrating Priesthood

*On Saturday, June 13, I had the privilege of ordaining four men to the priesthood of our local Church, two of whom, as far as we can tell, are the first two immigrant priests of Latino descent to be ordained here for this historic Archdiocese.*

Less than a week later, a year-long celebration of the priesthood began, in accordance with Pope Benedict's designation of the "Year for Priests," and co-designation of St. John Vianney as the Universal Patron of all priests on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the saint's death.

In this first edition of The Catholic Review since the Year for Priests began on June 19, I share the text of my homily from the ordination and encourage the continued prayers for an increase in priestly vocations, as well as prayers of thanksgiving for the priests of Jesus Christ already serving so generously among us.

My dear sons, Ernest, Marc, Hector and Gonzalo,

Could there be a more joyful, significant moment than an ordination day? From the farthest reaches of our Archdiocese and well beyond the People of God gather in great numbers to witness and participate in a ceremony which, in its essence, traces back to apostolic times.

The joy could not be more evident, even palpable. Friends from the parishes you have served while in the seminary rightly take pride on this day. Through their love of Christ and His Church you have already seen how thoroughly and effectively we priests are shaped by the People of God. And with such anticipation have your families looked forward to this day.

*I welcomed the friends and family members of our ordinands and, in their native tongue, I offered a special greeting to those joining us at the Cathedral that day from Colombia, South America, in support of their sons, now ours.*

How fortunate we are to have two more native Spanish speakers in our presbyterate. Hector and Gonzalo, through your special devotion to the Mass and to Eucharistic Adoration outside of Mass, I know for sure that our local Church will be blessed by

many more future priests who will bring the rich Catholic culture of Latin American into our Archdiocese.

I want to thank the priests of the Archdiocese here in great number, many of whom have shared a special role in your formation as pastors and mentors. Soon the four of you will kneel as one by one each priest will impose hands upon you. They will be expressing the special bond of priestly fraternity into which we are welcoming you. In effect, they will be offering prudent counsel: "the priest cannot act by himself; he acts with the presbyterate, becoming a brother of all who constitute it."

I would plead that you see in this presbyterate your place of sanctification and that you would, in turn, seek to support your brothers by faithful attendance at priest convocations and conferences, prayer groups, anniversaries and funerals. How indebted we all must be to those in our number who creatively seek ways to gather the brethren socially, and show special concern for those in difficulties.

My brothers - soon to be priests - each of you has won the respect and friendship of the priests of this great and historic Archdiocese. Lean on them for their support in the years ahead, and do all that you can to gather with them to strengthen your own priestly identity.

Gentlemen, you have chosen a portion of the Letter to the Hebrews as one of your readings, a letter that waxes extensively and eloquently on the significance of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and of those who share in Christ's priesthood. We've just heard proclaimed that the priest is to offer gifts and sacrifice for sins, his own sins as well as those of the people.

To offer sacrifice ...

All of us, one with Christ through baptism share in the priesthood of the faithful through prayer and through the offerings of our daily works of sacrifice. But it is through the ministerial priesthood, which this successor of the Apostles will confer on you this morning that you will act in the very person of Christ, and lead the People of God, through the Sacrifice of the Mass, into intimate participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

How significant and providential it is that each of you will celebrate your individual Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving tomorrow, on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. Pope John Paul II had much to say about the Eucharist in his last Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Eucharist Builds the Church.

The Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary ...

... is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there.

My brothers, at the consecration of every Mass, you will not simply repeat Christ's words of institution. Since only Jesus can effectively say, this is my Body, this is my Blood, by your configuration to Christ through this rite of Ordination, you will put your

... voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in His priesthood.

For in the sacraments, as our Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, "all that Christ is - all that he did and suffered for all of us - participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times."

And so the Pope explains:

"The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey."

With such an extraordinary gift entrusted to you, please, brothers, make this Eucharistic sacrifice the center and peak of your priestly prayer life. Be totally convinced, brothers, that whatever success you can rightly expect from priestly activity will flow mainly from this sacrifice.

I cannot exaggerate the central role of the Mass in your daily lives. Prepare well to celebrate each Mass you offer. Know that this greatest of all privileges that will be

yours, to allow the Word to become flesh on your altar, will bring countless graces and blessings upon God's holy people.

Finally, in regard to the Eucharist, I echo the consistent and unchanging voice of the Church that it is your responsibility as priests and pastors, "to encourage by your own personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species."

In this way, I am convinced, not only will your parish community increase in its love for Christ and be motivated to love of neighbor, but our Archdiocese will reap a harvest of vocations – yes, zealous lay ministries but also vocations as consecrated religious, deacons and most especially as priests. I thank our pastors for their leadership in offering our faithful greater opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration. Most especially, I thank our good people for their invariably positive and enthusiastic response to Eucharistic Adoration, a devotion which "prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the Mass itself."

Your reverent celebration of the daily Eucharist, enriched by your love of the word of God and complemented by your conscientious preaching of that word will enable the grace of God "to unite yourself more closely every day to Christ the High Priest who offered himself to the Father as a perfect sacrifice." Your total prostration on this sanctuary floor soon to come is your pledge to join yourself to Christ by a celibate offering of your bodies, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.

A sacrifice holy and pleasing to God, as well, will be the complete surrendering of your will to God's, in the full embrace of all our Church's teachings and traditions, and in full obedience to your bishop. And as our High Priest had nowhere to lay his head while he walked this earth, do not set your hearts on earthly riches or transient pleasures. With St. Paul, may you rate everything else as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of your Lord, Jesus Christ. For his sake, be willing to account all else as rubbish so that Christ alone may be your wealth.

And before we proceed with the beautiful liturgy of ordination, may I encourage you, my young brothers in ministry, to pattern your life on the life and death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. Christ, ever celibate, out of love for His bride, the Church;

Christ, ever poor in His humanity, for He possessed the fullness of the divinity; Christ, totally obedient to His father whom He trusted completely.

Now let us proceed to allow this singularly beautiful liturgy speak for itself. Take comfort in the fact that in the litany soon to follow, all the saints in Heaven and the Church Universal on earth join their prayer to ours this morning, Ernest, Marc, Hector and Gonzalo, as joyfully and gratefully we accompany you up to the Altar of God.

*For more information about the Year for Priests, visit [www.archbalt.org](http://www.archbalt.org).*