

Homily at Ordination Mass

Isaiah 61:1-3

The passage from the Prophet Isaiah is a reminder to us all of how the Lord God operates: Isaiah recounts how he was anointed by the Lord. “He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, . . .” Isaiah sees himself as one anointed by God, even as those who have prostrated themselves before this altar today are being prepared to be anointed by the Lord God. They come here humbly, acknowledging that whatever gift they are to receive is a gift from God for the good of God’s people.

With them, we give thanks for those who have been a blessing to them as they prepare for the Holy Priesthood. We give thanks for their parents and other family members, for their companions in school and seminary, for those who have taught them, for their parish priests who encouraged them along the way to the priesthood, for their teachers, and most recently for the professors and superiors in the seminary. All of these have helped them on their way and we give thanks to God for this assistance over the years.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

In the second reading, the Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians of the grace that “was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gifts.” They have received a special calling to walk after Jesus, to listen to his word and to explain it to others. With them, we thank God for this invitation to service and we pray that it will lead each of them to discover more deeply and surely the inner meaning of the word of God so that they may be able to share it with others.

Luke 22:14-20, 24-30

From Luke’s gospel, the priests-to-be inform me, they have come to reflect on the words of Jesus at his Last Supper in which he began the sacrifice that would reach fulfillment with his death on the Cross the next day.

He spoke the words of consecration, “This is my body, which will be given for you.

This is my blood, which will be shed for you.”

The priests-to-be tell me that their focus is on two aspects of this sacrifice:

- the lesson that theirs is the human vocation to love selflessly and,
- their understanding that the Mass is the sacrifice in which the offering of the people is made through one who represents them, the priest.

Jesus showed that the perfection of humanity as he offered himself on the Cross. He was perfectly unselfish, giving all that he had to give, loving perfectly. Indeed, another word for sacrifice is love.

Those to be ordained affirmed, “We are so constructed by God that we must love. That is what we are best suited to do. We are truly human only when we practice sacrificial love. To the degree that we don’t live completely and selflessly, we find ourselves unsatisfied and incomplete as human beings.”

The priest, who is called to imitate Christ as closely as humanly possible in chaste celibacy, prayer, and obedience, must give the highest example of sacrificial love to others.

The most perfect way to love God and others, they have come to see, is to participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. After offering his very body and blood at the Last Supper, Jesus said to the Apostles, “Do this in memory of me.” He who sacrificed and offered himself completely to God the Father, beginning at the Last Supper and ending on the Cross, wishes us to do the same together with him.

The priest who is called to represent Christ and act in his person cannot do so without embracing the virtue of humility, the virtue that reminds him of his smallness before God, his complete dependence on God for grace, itself a gift of the Lord. In the seminary, formation in the practices of prayer and spiritual self-discipline prepare the candidate for this virtue of humility.

Humility continually holds up before us the thought that we dare not presume t