

Homily of Cardinal Keeler at the Ordination of Bishop Denis J. Madden

(John 1:45-51) The words of Nathaniel in the Gospel passage still ring in our ears, “You are the Son of God...” To Nathaniel, who also was sometimes called Bartholomew, Jesus extended the invitation to follow him in a special way, to be one of the Twelve who would bear witness to the Lord even to the shedding of blood. In Bartholomew we see some of the enthusiasm and faith of the young people who this past week greeted Pope Benedict XVI at Cologne. Young people had earlier this year thronged St. Peter’s Square as the world prepared to bid farewell to his predecessor and then for the funeral of Pope John Paul II. They were there in great numbers as Pope Benedict began his service to the Church and to the world by reminding us that “The Church is alive and the Church is young.”

Bishop Madden, who is so familiar with the land of Jesus, has been called like Bartholomew to bear witness to the name and power of Jesus. He was sitting under the “fig tree” of his duties with Catholic Near East Welfare when the call came from the Holy Father’s representative in the United States, the Apostolic Nuncio, to service as an auxiliary bishop here, in his home diocese. (The Nuncio had hoped to join us today, and sends his best wishes to the new bishop.)

In the second reading (1 Timothy 4:12b-16) the Apostle Paul gives Timothy some good advice for one who is to be a leader in the Church. He invites him to be genuine in love of God, so much so, that the life of the leader will be “an example.” Bishop Madden understands that this gift, conferred through the prayers soon to be offered and “with the imposition of hands,” is a gift from God to be spent on others.

He is ready to “be diligent” as he discerns how to live this new ministry as bishop, and to “attend to” his own spiritual needs that he might be of service to others.

Bishop Madden comes back to us in Baltimore from a distinguished priestly service in the Middle East, a service he began by laboring with poor Palestinians, a service in which he worked patiently with representatives of three different Churches for the restoration of the dome of the historic Church built over the burial place of Jesus, the Holy Sepulchre.

In this Eucharist we pray with Jesus the Great High Priest, for Bishop Madden, that in his ministry among us, he may realize the words of the prophet Isaiah in the first reading (Isaiah 2:1-5), mindful that “from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.... They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” May God bless his servant efforts, strengthening him and all of us in the conviction, so clear from a careful reading of the words of Isaiah, that any good that might come from his ministry is of divine gift. It is the Holy Spirit who will teach us how to walk in the paths of divine choice. It is the Lord’s own Spirit who will settle the disputes among the nations.

May this Holy Spirit now transform a priest into a new apostle of the Lord for the building up of the Church; in this Year of the Eucharist, may the Spirit change the bread and wine upon the altar into the living Lord Jesus, given to us for our spiritual nourishment and strength.