

Ordination of Deacons

Introduction

Brother Bishops, Priests and Deacons, dear Religious, Seminarians of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and beyond, families and friends of our candidates for Ordination, and especially you who are so soon to be ordained: Christopher, William, Joshua, and Francis:

The Lord Jesus, in the Gospel, says to us, and to you, today: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Saint Damien

The tenth day of May, the day on which you are ordained Deacons is, in God’s providential design, the liturgical feast day of Saint Damien de Veuster, also known as Saint Damien of Moloka’i, or simply as “Father Damien.” He was the Belgian missionary priest who left his homeland and, for sixteen years, served the lepers in the Hawaiian leper colony, eventually contracting the disease himself, and dying from it.

It is interesting to note that May 10th is not the date of his birth - that was January 3rd. Nor was it the date of his death - that was April 15th. Rather, sixteen years before his death, in the spring of 1873, the superiors of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary asked four young missionaries, already stationed in Hawaii, if they would be willing to sail to the leper colony on the island of Moloka’i, each for three months at a time. There they would face unbelievably difficult conditions so that they could bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his Sacraments, to those dying of the dreaded disease of leprosy, while caring for their needs of body, mind and soul.

It was on May 10th, 1873 that Father Damien said “yes.” He was the first to volunteer for this mission of charity, which he well knew could be also a martyrdom of charity. After three months in the leper colony, he requested from his provincial to stay there indefinitely. And the rest, as they say, is history.

So the feast day of Saint Damien is the day he uttered a heroic, generous “yes” to

God's specific plan for him. And through God's grace and through his generosity, this mission made him a saint. "Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Aspicientes in Iesum

On the day of his ordination as a Deacon and as a Priest, little could Saint Damien have imagined the circumstances into which God's Providence would place him, just as the particular, future circumstances of your ministry in the Lord's vineyard are now largely unknown to you.

The four of you, each in his own way, have forsaken what the world has to offer, in order to follow joyfully the voice of the Divine Master, calling you to lay down your lives for his glory, and for the salvation of souls. This "yes" to his call was made possible by His grace, and also by your generosity. But it is not a "yes" made only today, it is a "yes" to be renewed every day, until God calls you to eternity.

High above the tabernacle of this Basilica, just behind me, stands the crucifix of Archbishop Maréchal. There on the Cross, you see the figure of the Lord Jesus, who spared himself in nothing. Keeping your eyes fixed on the Crucified Lord will ensure that you will never be turned away from the joy of the Gospel even by all that the world has to offer.

Indeed, in the beautiful words of an 18th-century English hymn: His dying crimson, like a robe, spreads o'er his body on the tree; Then I am dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me. (Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, vs. 4)

Happy, Well-Pleased, and Resigned

As Deacons, you will exercise the ministry of the Word, of the Altar, and of Charity. In the course of your ministry, you will be called upon to be true servants, carrying out, in some cases, very humble work indeed. Saint Damien, for instance, found himself dressing ulcers, building homes and furniture, making coffins, and digging graves. All this, in his circumstances, flowed from and led back to his preaching of the Gospel and his celebration of the Sacraments. He said so memorably, "I have made myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ."

In much the same way, the fountain from which will flow the zeal and energy you will need each day is the Holy Eucharist. It was on the very night the Lord Jesus gave us the Eucharist that he stooped down in humble service to wash the feet of His apostles.

And as the “martyrdom of charity” of Saint Damien was entering its final stage, as his body began to manifest the signs of leprosy, he wrote: “The Blessed Sacrament is the stimulus for us all, for me as it should be for you, to forsake all worldly ambitions. Without the constant presence of our Divine Master upon the altar in my poor chapels, I never could have persevered in casting my lot with the lepers of Moloka’i; the consequence of which begins now to appear on my skin, and is felt throughout my body. Holy Communion is the daily bread of a priest, and so I feel happy, well pleased, and resigned in the rather exceptional circumstances in which it has pleased Divine Providence to put me.”

In His Will Is Our Peace

Christopher, William, Joshua, and Francis, through the imposition of my hands, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, you are now to be ordained to the sacred Order of the Diaconate.

In undertaking this ministry, you will entrust yourselves completely to God’s providence, which is the safest place you could possibly be. God has called you to this, and, as we see so clearly in the life of Saint Damien, God’s providence would never lead you to where his grace would not sustain you. This is why, in the words of the immortal Dante, “In His will is our peace.”

From this day forward, may Saint Damien be your special intercessor, advocate, and friend in Heaven. May his prayers deepen within each of you a capacity and a love for humble service, flowing from an ever-deeper friendship with Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

And, in this way, may it be yours to hear him say, on the last day,

“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.”

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!