

Pallottine Ordinations - Homily Reflections

What a great honor it is, at the invitation of your Provincial Superior, Father Frank Amato, to ordain priests for the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, the Pallottines. I express public thanks for this humbling privilege. I am most grateful for the presence of Father Zenon, the Vicar General of the Community, and of Father Peter Sticco, the former Provincial Superior.

It is humbling, because it brings a means of holiness into this world, through the priestly ministrations of those to be ordained. It is a privilege for the same sacred reason! In the name of the Church I want to thank all who have helped prepare these candidates for their new ministry. Their good parents and family members, their parish priests and those in the seminary who gave them guidance, and those who oversaw their pastoral formation in parish settings - to all of these we are deeply grateful.

Earlier this week, Deacons Salvatore and Joseph came to discuss with me the reasons why they chose the readings we have used at this Eucharistic Liturgy.

(Isaiah 61:1-3) The first reading takes us back to the jubilee events of the Hebrews and, indeed, to the year of the Jubilee given us five years ago by Pope John Paul II. Both our deacons know that they have been called out from God's people to serve others in the spirit of the first reading, a spirit of faith and understanding. They must believe that they are called to bring "glad tidings" to the lowly and "to heal the brokenhearted."

Thus, they will bring a positive force into a world where there are so many negative, destructive forces at work. Please pray for them that what they do will be truly fruitful among those whom they are sent.

(I Peter 5:1-4) The second reading admonishes our new priests-to-be in the moving words of Saint Peter, who looks forward to a final reward, the "unfading crown of glory," which will come for faithful service in shepherding God's people. Even as St.

Peter saw himself as a “witness to the sufferings of Christ,” so must these deacons see themselves as tied to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. The habits of prayer and self-denial acquired during their years of formation must continue to uphold their ministry in the name of Him who suffered and died for us.

(John 12:24-26) Jesus speaks in the Gospel passage of the “grain of wheat” which must die to be fruitful. We have here a part of his prayer to the Father offered on the threshold of what was to be a painful death. As one of the deacons pointed out to me, Jesus did not pray to be delivered from suffering, but rather embraced it. To the question, where is Jesus today, these men are prepared to say, “He is with the victims of poverty, oppression and war. He is in the ghettos and in the hospitals and nursing homes.”

The commitment these men now make to follow Jesus is a commitment which will be a blessing for the whole Church. They are ready to make His saving sacrifice present in the Eucharist, to share His pardon in the sacrament of penance, His new life in baptism, His transforming power in matrimony, and His healing love in the Sacrament of the Sick.

Let us now enter into the Eucharist with our prayer of support for them, as we unite ourselves with Jesus in these holy moments when He comes to act in our midst, mystically dying and rising for us.

Cardinal William H. Keeler
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