

Priesthood Ordination 2015

Introduction

Dear brothers, moments ago, your names were called: Carlos, Chris, Josh, and Francis. All of us heard the deacon pronounce your name; it rang out in every corner of this great Cathedral. Yet, you have heard not the voice of the deacon but rather the voice of Christ calling you by name to be a priest. Indeed, you would not have heard the deacon call your name if you had not been listening to the Lord's voice, especially during your years of priestly formation.

As your name was called you answered with a simple word: "Present!" Your answer did not merely indicate that you made it to the church on time to be ordained - No, it signaled something much more profound. You are saying to Christ and to the Church that you are wholly and entirely present: body, mind, and spirit; completely at the disposition of Christ and the Church; ready to dedicate yourself to his mission.

In the Upper Room and in the Synagogue

You have heard the call. You are ready to serve. Now the Risen Lord comes among us in this Cathedral church as once he came to the upper room and stood in the midst of the Apostles. On that first Easter Sunday, even though the disciples were still fearful and uncomprehending, Jesus imparted his blessing - "peace be with you" - and then he breathed upon them with the breath of the Holy Spirit. "Receive the Holy Spirit," Jesus said to them.

Dear brothers, so soon to be ordained: you are present here so that Christ can breathe upon you. By the prayer of the Church, the laying on of my hands, and the anointing with chrism, the Holy Spirit will enter your inmost being. Like a master artist he will fashion in your souls the living and indelible image of Christ the priest: head and shepherd of the Church.

In his love, Christ imparts to you the gift of his priesthood so that you can say with wonder and awe in your heart: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.” “The Lord has sent me to preach the good news.” “The Lord has sent me forth for the forgiveness of sins.” As diligently as you have prepared for this sacred moment, dear brothers, think of how undeserving anyone is to assume the mantle of Christ’s priesthood. But think even more of how much Christ loves you and how he wants to love the people of his Church in you and through you.

Sent to Preach the Good News

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the lowly, and to free those who were enslaved by the fear of death their whole life long. Now, dear brothers, you are to be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord. Like the Peter and the Apostles, you are being commissioned and sent forth to proclaim Christ, crucified and risen, and in his Name, to offer a word of healing, hope, and joy to people in every state and condition: to those who are poor and needy, who live on the margins of society; to those who are humbly seeking the presence of God in their lives, to those who have been wounded—spiritually, emotionally, or physically, to those who are imprisoned either literally or figuratively by their sins.

If you want to be effective in preaching the Word and teaching the faith, make sure that your relationship with the Lord is not cold and formal but warm and life-giving. Otherwise, you will merely be dispensers of tired ideas or boring information. You are anointed to proclaim words of spirit and life. Your words must pass from your hearts to the hearts of your listeners. Your words must ring true because of your integrity, virtue, and pastoral charity. And how we must ask the Lord’s help and the advice of others so that what we say will touch and illumine the realities of people’s daily lives. You are ambassadors through whom Christ calls the people you will serve not only to be practicing Catholics but indeed to become missionary disciples who follow Christ wholeheartedly and bear witness to him day in and day out.

For the Forgiveness of Sins

In this rite of Ordination, dear brothers, Jesus imparts to you the breath of the Holy Spirit so that you may continue his work of forgiving sins. When you preach, you seek the defeat of sin and the triumph of goodness. When you offer Mass, you transform bread & wine into Christ's Body & Blood, "*for the forgiveness of sins*" ... When you celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you will absolve penitents of their sins, both big and small. And when you pour out your life in service to others you will be ministers of Christ's love, stronger than sin and more powerful than death.

For many, the business of dealing with sin and human weakness seems dreary. For sin is never good news but always bad news in our lives and relationships. The prevailing way of dealing with sin in our times is to deny that it exists even as it festers in human hearts and just under the surface of our fragile civility. Some may even tell us that they don't want or need what we have to offer. But be neither afraid nor flustered. The human heart is made for love, that love of which you are the ministers. After 38 years of priesthood, I can attest how much joy God's mercy brings to the one who imparts it and to the one who receives it. How blessed you are to begin your priestly service in a special holy year proclaimed by Pope Francis and dedicated to God's mercy.

Conclusion

A word of fatherly advice before I ordain you, and it's this: don't go it alone. You are being ordained not into private practice but into the Order of the Presbyterate, as part of a company priests, who serve the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Come to know and love your brother priests, and learn from them. Seek their support and offer them yours; you'll be glad you did.

With us are your family, your friends and classmates, & parishioners from near & far. With you, I thank them for helping to nurture your priestly vocation. Stay in

touch; show them your love and gratitude; seek their continued prayers. Ask them to help you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and your ministry anchored in the realities of daily life.

Finally, let us all call upon the Virgin Mary, our Mother and our Queen. Beg her to help you listen to her Son calling your name every day of your lives. Ask her to help you respond to Christ & to his Church, "I'm present!" "Here I am!" Then you will truly know 'the joy of Gospel'! May God bless you and keep you in his love!