

Priesthood Ordination

The most humbling task of a bishop, and at the same time a great joy and privilege, is to ordain a priest for service to the Church. It is humbling because it is a moment when the power of Jesus uses a weak human instrument to continue what Jesus did on the night before he died, insuring that his great sacrifice, offered once for all on the Cross on Good Friday, would continue to be with his people.

So many of you here have helped bring these deacons to the altar of ordination today. To parents and other family members, to priests, teachers, seminary professors and schoolmates, to friends and associates, I express the thanks of the Archdiocese for your special role. Later, I shall speak in greater detail. Also, I want to call attention to a step that makes today's Ordination Mass more like other Masses: there will be a collection, and the ordination class has determined that the collection will be divided into three parts, one-third for the education of future priests, one-third for our inner city schools, and one-third for the needs of the Cathedral Church we are privileged to use today.

Those to be ordained today have chosen the readings from the word of God that give a color, a flavor, a sense of what is to happen here in the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. The Church as well, through the extraordinary ministry of Pope John Paul II, to whom the deacons referred in their presentation to me, has made a contribution. As I reflected on the readings, on what this class has said to me about their own devotion to Our Lady, and on the priesthood itself, it struck me that there is an amazing parallel between their suggestions and the new Mysteries of Light proposed by the Holy Father for the recitation of the Rosary, that prayer to Mary which is an extended reflection on the Gospels. These Luminous Mysteries focus on the public life of Jesus, the model for the priestly life of those to be ordained today.

(Isaiah 61:1-3) The ordination class has quoted for me the words of the Holy Father about the Chrism Mass when the oils of the Sacraments are blessed, including the oil with which their hands are to be anointed this morning: "[Jesus] stands at the center of the Liturgy of the Chrism Mass when the oils are blessed that will bring the balm of grace to God's People. In his anointing, Christ gathers in unity all who share his consecration: the baptized, the confirmed, the ordained. He is united with

each one by the anointing in the power of the Spirit, whom He has given us in the Easter Triduum of His sacrifice; in His cross, death and resurrection, when He 'freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.' (Rev 1:5-6)"

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah was quoted by Jesus at the outset of his own preaching. His anointing took place at the Jordan River. It was a crucial moment now remembered in the first of the Mysteries of Light of the Rosary, in the baptism that is the moment when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and then led him into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus faced these various tests and thus gave to his disciples in every age an example of what the power of God's grace can mean in their, indeed, in our own lives.

Then Jesus moved on to proclaim the Good News through his preaching and teaching, something the priests ordained today are called to do. Even more, they are called to be messengers of light, to heal the broken hearted and to set captives free through the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation and help them to bear the cross of suffering through their pastoral counseling. The Gospel itself is a comforting message for all people, but especially for the poor and the oppressed, who need to hear how much God loves them in the midst of a world with no time or heart for what is of the spirit. Their preaching must be an inviting, joyous call to live the virtues of faith, hope and love and to do the works of mercy and of justice.

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