

HOMILY
Ordination of Deacon Zach Kautzky
June 4, 2010 – St. Ambrose Cathedral

Marc Hansen, a journalist for the Des Moines Register, recently raised a question for Deacon Zach Kautzky that Marc feels is widespread in contemporary society: “Why in the world would you want to be a priest in this day and age when faith and religion are challenged and one’s life in ministry can seemingly be so restricted?”

Zach’s responses betrayed his extended years of formation and study and the fact that he embraces the call to priesthood with eyes wide open. The initial seeds of his vocation were sown in his home where his father and mother, Greg and Lori, integrated faith into family life in a natural way on the farm.

The influence of his uncle, Father Jon Kautzky, a priest of the Diocese of Des Moines, touched Zach early. Besides the attachment to an uncle he admired, Zach could easily observe the impact a priest can have. Accompanying his uncle on communion calls, Zach saw how old, lonely, shriveled individuals were transformed with the coming of the priest. Bringing communion, the Body of Jesus, the bread of life, sparked a radiant smile and uncovered a vital spirit in the recipient.

The call of Jesus to share in his priesthood which is confirmed by the Church in the rite of ordination, is one that individuals wrestle with. Zach came to grips with the call of Jesus “I have chosen you, you have not chosen me,” in the Spanish caves where St. Ignatius of Loyola confronted the same invitation from Jesus.

In the midst of this dialogue with Christ while in Spain, Pope John Paul II died in Rome. The Holy Father, as was the case with hundreds of thousands of Zach’s generation had reached into Zach’s soul. Joining millions of mourners in Rome for the Pope’s funeral, the call was further confirmed for Zach to respond to the priesthood vocation.

The question that Marc Hansen of the *Des Moines Register* posed to Zach could just as easily have been asked of Andrew or Matthew by a Joshua Bar Jonah of the Jerusalem Temple Times in 40 A.D.

“Andrew and Matthew what in the world are you doing in following this upstart Jesus when you can have a simple, uncomplicated life as a fisherman or tax collector and enjoy the quiet respect of your fellow citizens and be engaged with them in a shared culture?”

The apostles similar to those how have followed in this path, respond “We have come to know and love the Lord Jesus who is the Son of God. He has the Words of Life. Jesus has entrusted to us the mission of proclaiming his gospel.” Almost imperceptively, the Apostles and succeeding generations of priests have grown into the three-fold responsibilities entrusted to the priestly office. They are called to sanctify, to be prophetic and to take on the role of shepherd.

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In coming to know Jesus, the early disciples identified the divine qualities and how these were transmitted to Jesus' companions. They were introduced as to what it means to share God's life, to be holy.

Pope Benedict XVI in our own century captured this reality when he observed "Holy is God's specific quality of being namely, absolute truth, goodness, love, beauty-pure light. Thus, sanctifying a person means putting him or her in touch with God, with this being light, truth, pure love" (General Audience, May 5, 2010)

The sanctifying role of the priest is carried out in the Sacraments through which we are initiated into the life of God by Baptism and nurtured and brought together as one Body in the Eucharist which Jesus introduced to the Apostles and their successors at the first Mass, the last Supper. Moreover, the priest becomes the instrument used by Christ to reconcile sinners in the Sacrament of Penance and to extend compassion and healing in the Sacrament of the sick.

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Jesus traces his lineage as prophet to Isaiah as he assumed the role enunciated by the Old Testament prophet.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners."

In applying this calling to our times, the priest immersed in his native culture and acting with loving care for his brothers and sisters is compelled to introduce his contemporaries to a profound vision of life. This vision substitutes the superficial for a substantive relationship with God and neighbor. Such a relationship produces a spirit of joy, and the authentic freedom to love.

This message is embodied in the selfless actions, love and teachings of Jesus which are transmitted to the priest. Thus, we welcome the stranger known as immigrant and refugee. We share from our own need with the poor, the vulnerable those who lack opportunity and are stymied at the lowest rung of humanity.

The prophet of today further reveals through application of the natural rhythm embedded by God in creation our responsibility to preserve and enhance the life and dignity of all our brothers and sisters in the human family from the moment of conception until natural death. Highlighted, also, is the privileged relationship of husband and wife in marriage, which relationship is compared to the nuptial relationship of Christ and His Church.

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As priests identify with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the timeless quality of what they are about was noted by Pope John Paul II in Pastores Dabo Vobis – “Their mission is not theirs but is the same mission as Jesus” Cardinal Francis George further specifies this identification when he notes that the ministry of the priest in line with Jesus “is always self-gift in generative love, self-sacrifice for the sake of others.” (*The Difference God Makes*, Francis Cardinal George, OMI, page 215).

Exercising his role as shepherd, the priest is called to be kind, patient, pastoral, hopeful even of the most calcified sinner and obstructive opponent. In Jesus’ flock, no one is forever lost. Each is worthy of painstaking and prolonged retrieval animated by a loving heart.

The priest as shepherd always seeks to bring about the unity that rested deeply in the heart of Jesus – “That they may be one as you are in me, Father, and I in you.”

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The identity that will be Zach Kautzky’s as he becomes priest has generated questions from Apostolic Times by Journalists as Joshua Bar Jonah of the *Jerusalem Temple Times* to Marc Hansen of the *Des Moines Register*. Zach in the role of the priest will stand at the intersection between God and his brothers and sisters in the human family. Quite simply, “God’s ways are not man’s ways.” Thus, as servant, Zach is being called to be an instrument of convergence, of facilitating unity between man and God, a movement in large measure which is far from being compelling or apparent to the human heart.

In this ministry Deacon Zach is enthusiastically welcomed by all in the Diocese of Des Moines. Nor will Zack be isolated. Today he joins the presbyterate, the priest fraternity of the Diocese of Des Moines. As he becomes further acquainted with his brother priests, Zach will discover, as I have over these past two years, a dedicated, generous, self-sacrificing, very human, spiritually generative group of disciples who will provide ongoing support and inspiration.

The presbyterate welcomes you, Zach. In this Year for Priests, when we highlight the role of the Priest, your brothers in the Church of Des Moines experience rejuvenation and the priestly renewal the year calls by virtue of your joining us, a zealous, loving, energetic and competent brother to our midst.