

Homily
Ordination to Priesthood
Diocese of Des Moines
June 5, 2015

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

The two ordinands, Luis Mejia Mejia and Andrew Windschitl exemplify the classical description: priests are men taken from among men for the service of God.

I remember the moment like yesterday, when participating in a Novos young adult gathering; Andrew came up to me and said, “I’m thinking about priesthood. I plan to go into the seminary.” Music obviously to a bishop’s ears. Andrew has a B.A. from the University of Northern Iowa and was gainfully employed at Marsh Insurance. Plucked from this typical path, God chose him for his service. He comes from among us to be God’s ordained servant.

Luis, on the other hand, originates from a Latino culture. He, too, had been gainfully employed at Pollo Comparo arguably the best eating chicken in El Salvador. The tug of God, though, was irrepressible.

Luis entered the Seminary in El Salvador. Finding himself with the blessing of abundant vocations, Bishop Elias Bolanos, Bishop of Zacatecoluca, El Salvador, in his extraordinary generosity gifted Luis “donum fidei” to the Diocese of Des Moines to minister to the burgeoning Hispanic community. Gracias Obispo Elias. Bienvenidos Luis.

Andrew and Luis found themselves responding to God’s call together at the St. Paul Seminary. God entices individuals into service by all sorts of motivations. But, like the Apostles and disciples of Jesus, the maturation of a vocation eventually involves a relationship of love with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God. In time, this love seeks expansion to embrace all God’s children.

The pathway to priesthood is marked by challenge and discipline. Andrew still wonders what the intensive study of philosophy has to do with his priestly call. Laboring endlessly on English, Luis asks what difference does a small Hispanic accent make among plain-spoken Iowans?

The two in the course of their formation experienced self-doubt, unworthiness and a sense of inadequacy in the face of expectations

placed on a priest. It was the encouragement arising from prayer and the relationship of each with the Lord Jesus, as well as encouragement from family, friends and fellow seminarians, the guidance of seminary faculty and priests, parishioners, Serrans, Knights of Columbus and so many others that saw them through to this day. It is literally a village immersed in a culture of vocation, which enables them to now comfortably own priesthood.

Recognizing the spousal nature of their vocation they wholeheartedly embrace with Christ the Church as bride. This comes about not in a figurative manner but concretely in the very communities and people whom they will be sent to serve. Like any authentic spouse, they want to put forth their very best in unconditional love and sacrifice in order that the other might prosper.

It is my good fortune to welcome them as partners in the apostolic ministry entrusted to me. They join 103 brothers constituting the Presbyterate of the Church of Des Moines who reflect the diversity at the heart of one Church. They will come to discover young, energetic, idea filled priests side by side with senior brothers, wise, seasoned, mellow yet appropriately zealous in their ongoing ministry especially is this the case with our beloved retired priests. They will also find out that they hold this treasure in earthen vessels (1 Cor. 4:7) as Pope Francis

points out that we priests are still on the road to perfection as some of us can give way to occasional gossip, be opinionated among other human foibles.

The predominant secular culture that Andrew and Luis will encounter as they begin their service is one that is growing more distant from organized religion. Those who check none in terms of religious affiliation are growing. The result is widespread indifference or even hostility by those who feel religion impedes personal freedom. One might then conclude that it is time for religious types to head for cover, to circle the wagons, resist with towering judgmentalism all the errors afloat in our times.

Counter-intuitively, the second Vatican Council advocated encounter with modern society striving to make the Church's ministry more accessible. Pope Francis incessantly calls for missionary discipleship – disciples totally imbued with the spirit and teachings of Jesus sent to bring his love and truth to the people on the peripheries, to members of the throw-away society. Blessed Mother Theresa tells us we are called to greatness – as we open doors to Jesus. Jesus entrusted this mission to the apostles at the last supper: “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.” John 17; 18

Andrew and Luis undertake their priestly ministry as the universal Church embarks on a Holy Year of Mercy to accentuate the call to move out to the broader world with Gospel joy. Of this year, Pope Francis proclaimed: “How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst.” (Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Induction for Holy Year of Mercy)

The ministry for which you, Luis and Andrew, are being ordained and the identity it imparts “in persona Christi – in the person of Christ” puts you at the center of this Holy Year. You take on the task of Isaiah and that of Jesus “to announce a year of favor from the Lord.” (Isaiah 61; 2) Moreover, a coordinate of accessibility in Church circles is hospitality. May you always be agents of that hospitality in the ministry entrusted to you by ordination:

- When initiating God’s life in those you baptize following the Holy Father’s direction to not turn away anyone who asks for Baptism;
- By unfolding God’s Word and its applicability to real life in homilies – and all of us preachers are called to take to heart Pope Francis’ recent counsel that our homilies not be boring;

- In celebrating the Eucharist in a manner that draws the gathered priestly people into a participation that is full, active and conscious and in touch with the profound act of Mercy, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus made present in these moments;
- By being the bridge between God and man in the Sacrament of Reconciliation where Baptism is renewed and our heartfelt sorrow is responded to with tangible healing and forgiveness;
- In the administration of the Sacrament of the Sick where God's healing power is communicated with great consolation in the midst of painful vulnerabilities.

Luis and Andrew, you have received the mercy of God countless times. You have absorbed the tenderness of his gaze in moments of isolation and emotional pain. Tonight in fidelity to God's call, in a spirit of great humility and sustained by faith and God's ever present grace, you are endowed with a sacramental character that continues the extension of God's mercy in our days. The Church of Des Moines welcomes you with hearts full of joy!