

Homily
Priesthood Ordination

June 7, 2013

In a few minutes, our three ordinandi – Ross Parker, Fabian Moncada and Adam Westphal will prostrate themselves on the floor. With this time honored ritual, they will begin the ordination rite.

As they lay flat before the Lord and this community, without words, they testify to their intentions – “Here I am Lord, I come to do your will.”

Very much aware of their human frailty, after considerable reflection and perhaps occasional resistance, like Jeremiah they have heard and now definitively respond to the call of the Lord. They recognize their unworthiness as well as their inability to do what the Lord is asking of them, namely to speak God’s Word and to make God’s will known in our times.

This posture, therefore, highlights their humility before the Lord and their total dependence on him to carry out what God asks of them. In spite of these hesitations the voice of God has penetrated. Each now responds as God's servant prepared to do his bidding.

At the moment, when these three lay prostrate, we the priestly people, all of us gathered as Church, pray over them. We invoke God's power accompanied by the intercession of the saints that they be consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We ask that they stand in loco Christi, in the place of Christ as Christ's Body, the Church, is extended in space and time.

It is a blessing that this ordination occurs on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For the identity that is bestowed on each of the three, this evening, is beautifully illustrated by their hearts becoming one with the heart of Jesus. St. John Vianney stated that "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus."

It is this heart that motivated Jesus to pour himself out on behalf of all so that through his sacrificial death, doors to relationship with God, formerly closed, might be opened. All those, categorized by St. Paul, as God's enemies, that is, sinners, are now reconciled.

As priests these three are not intended to be mere functionaries, in the liturgy and their priestly ministry, merely uttering the words calling down the Holy Spirit by which the Paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus is made present. On April 21st at the ordination of priests for the Diocese of Rome, Pope Francis pinpointed this reality when he said, "Therefore, carry out the ministry of Christ the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but to those of Jesus Christ. You are pastors, not functionaries. Be mediators, not intermediaries."

It is by ordination our three brothers will be forever changed as their hearts now become merged with that of Jesus. It is in acknowledgement

of this transforming reality that Pope John Paul II dedicated this feast of the Sacred Heart to the sanctification of priests. To be holy is to take on the ways of God and allow his life and Spirit to transform our own.

These three sons of God will preside at the Eucharistic sacrificial meal. Moreover, as the Second Vatican Council points out, in the Person of Christ, they will baptize initiating God's sons and daughters into the divine family. They will forgive the sins of God's pilgrim people in the Sacrament of Penance. They will stand as God's witness as a man and woman commit themselves in love to one another in marriage. They will invoke God's healing power in the Sacrament of the Sick and accompany the dying on the inevitable transition to eternal life.

The ministry of the priest whose heart is aligned with that of Jesus is characterized by compassion and fidelity. The priest readily understands the suffering and weakness which all experience as humans. Not only does the priest understand, but with the heart of Jesus he reaches out in endless patience to minister and welcome those alienated and estranged

from the Church. This demanding love calls for tireless efforts to track down the wandering and lost sheep, the focus of the Good Shepherd. The priest rejoices with God and enters into a huge celebration as each lost one is found.

In a particular way, as Pope Francis has witnessed in action as well as words, the priest in his ministry is to choose as a priority, outreach to the poor, disadvantaged, those who suffer from physical or mental illness.

Accompanying this service of charity the priest is to issue the call for prophetic witness based on Catholic Social Justice Teaching. In so doing, priests lead and inspire the believing community to promote justice in the public square. By our witness all Christians are to proclaim the life and dignity of every human person from the moment of conception until natural death.

Originating with Pope Paul VI, these three young men enter into an ecclesial era that is framed as the moment of the New Evangelization.

In this regard, we welcome our honored guest, Archbishop José Octavio Ruiz Arenas, who serves the universal Church as the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for promoting the New Evangelization.

Our Western culture, in large measure, has drifted from a God focused world. This culture attributes meaning essentially to material reality. It professes that truth is not objectively attained through God's revelation in union with human reason but resides rather with each individual subjectively.

Leadership from priests and other teachers is urgently needed to counter this pervasive perspective of human life. It is a witness that hopefully will galvanize all in the Church to come to embrace the New Evangelization as their personal responsibility. The mission of all disciples is to make Jesus Christ known and loved in our time by choosing to live out the Gospel at every moment.

One of the marvels of ordination to priesthood is that the individual being ordained, while becoming identified with Jesus in a union of hearts, does not lose his unique personality. As a matter of fact, human traits endear him to those he serves. They provide an 'entre' to the service he renders. The priest's personal and familial characteristics attract others to identify with him. Accordingly, we want to thank the parents, families, friends and mentors for the investment that all have made in shaping the personalities of Ross, Fabian, and Adam. God now incorporates their human gifts in the ongoing mission of his Son. At the same time, in the exercise of their vocation these three have continuing need for your affection and support. Please continue your good work.

During their five years of priestly formation, I have come to appreciate and know well each of these three men. Tonight, I wholeheartedly welcome them with joy to the ministry entrusted to me and my brother priests in the presbyterate of the great Diocese of Des Moines. In placing their lives at the service of the Church, they bring abundant hope to all of us.