

Homily
Candidacy for Priesthood
Diocese of Des Moines
July 5, 2015
Bishop Richard Pates

My friends in Christ,

The four men who have responded with a firm “present” stand here today among the community of the Church recommended to me and to you for admission for holy orders in the Diocese of Des Moines.

Christ gave this command: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest.” Our brothers know the Lord’s concern for his flock, they see the needs of the Church, and they feel ready to respond generously in the words of the prophet: “Here I am Lord, send me forth.” They put their hope in the Lord, trusting that they may answer his call faithfully.

Like the Apostles, at the core of the vocation which they are now seeking to fulfill, is their relationship with Jesus.

They recognize Jesus truly as the Son of God, who has the words of life. But also, like the disciples and companions during Christ’s days on earth, they experience friendship and intimacy with him. This relationship leads them to sense that they are to share his ministry and to make known the unending Mercy of God.

The scripture readings of today help us understand aspects of the vocation to which the four aspire. In Ezekiel, it is the Lord who speaks directly to the prophet who is sent on a mission on behalf of God. The Lord provides the message to be communicated to his people. This is possible because the prophet allows his own mind and heart to be filled with the Lord’s very life. The people to whom he is sent are hard of heart and the prophet is the agent of God’s compassion and God’s mercy to them. The bottom line is that God wants his people to experience his love, his faithfulness and demonstrates that in the person of a prophet. Like these prophets of old, the priest today comes among the people in persona Christ – in the very person of Christ in order that his love might be rendered in the immediacy of our created nature.

Our candidates may feel very inadequate in facing this task which seems so daunting in representing God in this way. He questions, how can I with my weaknesses, my failures and especially my sinfulness ever succeed in such a role?

In the passage of the letter to the Ephesians proclaimed today, it is related that the Apostle Paul experienced similar feelings. The Lord replied to Paul’s protestations about this condition “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” Upon reflection, Paul turns the reality about face and accepts his weaknesses because Christ fills them in with his own strength. It is when we surrender ourselves completely to God that he uses us, strengths and weaknesses, to accomplish his will and be present to others.

And if ever we begin to think that what is being accomplished is due to our superior personality we are quickly brought home to reality by our family, our friends who know us so intimately and never let us forget.

When Jesus was about his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth, the local folk who knew him when, raised the question: “Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands? Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”

This call from the Lord should be recognized and understood from the daily signs which reveal God’s will to these men in their ongoing discernment. When God chooses men to share in the ordained priesthood of Christ he moves their hearts and helps them by his grace. At the same time, he entrusts us serving the Church as his ministers of calling suitable and approved candidates and of consecrating them by a special seal of the Holy Spirit for the mission of God and of the Church.

By the sacrament of holy orders they will be appointed to share in the ministry of salvation that Christ accomplishes in the world. When the time comes, they will be given a part in our ministry of service to the Church and build up by word and sacrament the communities of the Church of Des Moines to which they will be sent.

Our four brothers have begun their preparation so that down the road they can be called to ordination to priesthood by the bishop. Day by day they will learn to live the life of the Gospel and deepen their faith, hope and love. In the practice of these virtues they will gain the spirit of prayer and grow in their zeal to win the world to Christ.

Urged on by Jesus’ love and strengthened by the Holy Spirit they have come here to the Church of Saint Theresa, to declare in public their heartfelt desire to commit themselves to the service of God and the human family. We welcome them wholeheartedly and pledge our support on their journey.

And now my four friends allow the Church to call you to pursue with our full affirmation the path to priesthood