

Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt's Homily

Ordination of Priests

June 2, 2007

Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, Greensburg

Beloved brothers and sisters: because these our sons, who are your relatives and friends, are now to be advanced to the Order of the priests, consider carefully the nature of the rank in the Church to which they are about to be raised.

It is true that God has made his entire holy people a royal priesthood in Christ through baptism. Nevertheless, our great Priest himself, Jesus Christ, chose certain disciples to carry out publicly in his name, and on behalf of all mankind, a priestly office in the Church. For Christ was sent by the Father and he in turn sent the Apostles into the world, so that through them and their successors, the Bishops, he might continue to exercise his office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd. Indeed, priests are established co-workers of the Order of Bishops, with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the people of God. Priests are an extension of the teaching, sanctifying, and governing ministry of the Bishop. As the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (nr. 28) states, "Priests, therefore, take part in the Bishop's priesthood and mission. As virtuous co-workers with the Episcopal Order, called to serve the people of God, they constitute one presbyterate in union with their Bishop while being charged with different duties."

After mature deliberation, these, our brothers, are now to be ordained to the priesthood in the Order of the presbyterate so as to serve Christ the Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd, by whose ministry his body, that is, the Church, is built up and grows into the people of God, a holy temple.

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis) nr. 2 likewise of the Second Vatican Council states, "By sacred Ordination a sacrament is conferred on priests through which, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, they are signed with a special character and are so configured to Christ the Priest that they have the power to act in the Person of Christ the Head."

In being configured to Christ the eternal High Priest then and joined to the priesthood of the Bishops, they will be consecrated as true priests of the New Testament, to preach the Gospel, to shepherd God's people, and to celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Lord's sacrifice in the Eucharist. The priest stands then in the place of Christ.

Now, dear sons, you are to be raised to the Order of the priesthood. For your part you will exercise the sacred duty of teaching in the name of Christ the Teacher. Impart to everyone the word of God which you have received with joy. Remember that it is the Lord's teaching come to us through the Church that you are to impart, not your own. Meditating on the law of the Lord, see that you believe what you read, that you teach what you believe, and that you practice what you teach.

In this way, let what you teach be nourishment for the people of God. Let the holiness of your lives be a delightful fragrance to Christ's faithful, so that by word and example you may build up the house which is God's Church.

Likewise you will exercise in Christ the office of sanctifying. For by your ministry the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful will be made perfect, being united to the sacrifice of Christ, which will be offered through your hands in an unbloody way on the altar, in union with the faithful, in the celebration of the sacraments. In this way Christ's own redemptive work is continued throughout history. Understand, therefore, what you do and imitate what you celebrate. As celebrants of the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection in the Eucharist, strive to put to death whatever in your members is sinful, and to walk in newness of life. By the commitment you have already made to priestly celibacy, you have turned over your whole life to God in service to Jesus Christ and his Church.

Remember, when you gather others into the people of God through Baptism, and when you forgive sins in the name of Christ and the Church in the sacrament of Penance; when you comfort the sick with holy oil and celebrate the sacred rites, when you offer prayers of praise and thanks to God throughout the hours of the day, not only for the people of God but for the whole world -- remember then that you are taken from among men and appointed on their behalf for those things that pertain to

God. 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.

Finally, dear sons, be mindful that you exercise for your part the office of Christ, Head and Shepherd always united with the Bishop and subject to him. In this priestly ordination rite, you will promise the Bishop obedience again. This is not subjecting yourself to the capriciousness of another person, but rather a commitment to radical openness to service in the Church. For that reason it is intimately bound up also with the commitment to priestly celibacy. You are ordained for service to the Church of the Diocese of Greensburg. You are not ordained for the service of a particular parish or for a particular ministry. By your commitment to service you are committing yourself to serve wherever the greater good of the Church at a particular time and place demand it. Be mindful that your Bishop is also himself committed to serve the same greater good of the Church and must bear it in mind when he asks you to serve in a particular capacity. I ask the faithful also to bear this in mind when a priest is transferred from their midst or sent to them for pastoral ministry. The section of the Conciliar document "Lumen Gentium" which I cited earlier states: "Priests take part in the Bishop's priesthood and his mission." The Bishop's mission is to the whole diocese. Therefore, the priest's mission of service is likewise to the entire diocese.

Strive to bring the faithful together into one family, so that you may lead them to God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Keep always before your eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and who came to seek out and save what was lost.

Be at peace, my brothers, for the will of God will never take you where his grace cannot keep you!