

June 4, 2022

10:00 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Priesthood Ordination for Jacob Paul Thomas

(2 Cor.4:1-2,5-7; 1 Tim.4:12-16; Jn.17:6,14-19)

Comments at Beginning of Mass:

As we come together here in our Cathedral to celebrate the Ordination to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ of one of our own young men, Jacob Paul Thomas, it is so appropriate that we do so on this Vigil of the great Solemnity of Pentecost, and on the eve of the closing of our Diocese's "Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit".

It was on that historic occasion of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first came upon the Apostles, huddled together in the Upper Room where a little more than 50 days before, Jesus had "ordained" them His priests, and when now the Holy Spirit would fill them with his seven-fold Gifts and send them forth to proclaim boldly, courageously and joyfully the Good News of the Risen Jesus to all the world.

We have come together 2,000 years later to witness the working of that same Holy Spirit through this ancient, yet ever-new, Rite of Ordination when, by the laying on of hands and the anointing with Sacred Chrism, Jacob Thomas will become a Priest of Jesus Christ, fully prepared to be sent forth to various parts of the nine counties of our Diocese to continue the ongoing mission of the Church to bring the Risen Jesus and His Gospel to those who need this Good News, even if they do not realize it.

And so, on this important day, and in light of the joy of the purpose of our gathering, I am very pleased to welcome all of you here to our Cathedral---those here in person and those joining us virtually as well.

In particular I want to welcome Deacon Jacob's fellow parishioners from St. Philip Parish in Battle Creek, and the various other parishes where the Thomas' have lived through Jacob's lifetime. I also welcome all of Deacon Jacob's extended family, relatives and dear friends, and in a special way Deacon Jacob's Grandmother Betty, brother Dylan, his wife Amanda, and their daughter Ada; his sister Anna and her husband, Naeem; and of course his proud parents, Mary and Scott.

I welcome all our deacons and priests who are here with us today. In a particular way, I welcome Father Timothy Laboe, the Dean of Studies, and representing the administration and faculty of Sacred Heart Major Seminary where Jacob completed his college studies, and has received his theological and spiritual formation over these last many years.

And so, as People of Faith, on this great Vigil of Pentecost, as we are about to enter into these Holy Mysteries in which the Holy Spirit will transform Deacon Jacob into a Priest of Jesus Christ, and enable us all to celebrate the Presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd in His Word and the Holy Eucharist, let us prepare ourselves to do so by remembering and giving thanks to God for our Baptism into Christ through this Sprinkling Rite.

Homily:

My brother priests and deacons, those living in consecrated life, dear members of the Faithful of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and visitors from elsewhere, and dear family and friends of our Ordination Candidate---*Pax Vobis! La Paz este con ustedes! Peace be with you!*

There's no more important nor more joyful moment in the life of any Diocese than the day when a young man is Ordained a Priest. All of us who love the Church, and who treasure our Faith, realize how very important Priests are. They provide for our pastoral and Sacramental needs, and most especially, they keep us intimately connected to our Lord Jesus through the Holy Eucharist. Today is that important and joyful day for our Diocese; and Deacon Jacob, you are that young man who, very shortly by the Grace of God and the Power of the Holy Spirit, will be transformed---ordained---as a Priest of Jesus Christ.

When Father Jose assured me that you have been well-prepared and have been found "worthy" by holy Mother Church, and I, being personally convinced that the Lord Jesus Himself has called you to this Sacred Order, and therefore confident in choosing you to be Ordained---in spite of those assurances, as that Statement I made said so well, we must ultimately continue "relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ". The thunderous applause in response to that "choice" was an expression of our collective thanksgiving to God that we---the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo---are about to be blessed with another Priest.

But for this important and joyful occasion of the Ordination of a new Priest to take place on the Vigil of Pentecost is like "icing on the Birthday cake", because as we know, Pentecost is the Birthday of the Church---the day when, instead of Birthday Candles, the Holy Spirit dramatically ignited the Hearts of the Apostles with the Fire of His Love, and then sent them forth to set the world on fire with the Good News of the Gospel. And my dear Son in the Lord, that is what the same Holy Spirit intends to do within you as well.

Each of the Readings from God's Holy Word we heard this morning---from St. Paul to the Corinthians, as well as St. Paul to Timothy, and the words we heard from Jesus Himself in His Farewell Prayer to His Father on behalf of His Apostles as He was about to leave them-- reminded us that God is our Strength, and that in spite of our weakness, our imperfections, and even in the face of the many challenges of the world around us, we will be able to prevail as long as we keep ourselves open to God's Life within us.

In his Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul put it so appropriately when he reminded us priests in particular: "*we hold this treasure (the preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord) in earthen*

vessels". And that is why as St. Paul then wrote so beautifully to his beloved son-in-the-Lord Timothy: *"Do not neglect the gift you have" which came through the "imposition of hands". "Set an example for those who believe (through) in (your) speech, conduct, love, faith and purity."* And, most importantly, St. Paul reminded Timothy: *"Attend to yourself and to your ministry"*. In other words, we as priests not only need to help sanctify those whose spiritual and pastoral care is entrusted to us, but at the same time, we need to keep growing in our own sanctity. Because, as St. Paul concludes, we are working for the salvation of *"both yourself and those who listen to you."*

And as Jesus was preparing to complete His saving mission in the world, and would be entrusting that mission to His Apostles, Jesus knew that they would be facing huge challenges in the world into which He would send them. And yet, Jesus' Prayer to His Father wasn't to spare them from the challenges; Jesus asked His Father for only two requests: *"keep them from the Evil One"* and *"consecrate them in the Truth"*.

The world in which we all live is filled with incredible challenges. There are great divisions among individuals, and a growing amount of violent and hateful actions; we are experiencing a seismic cultural shift as the world moves further and further away from God and God's ways, while embracing the false "religion" of secularism, and discarding standards, values, or morality in favor of relativism and subjective truth. We rely on Jesus' Prayer to protect us from the Evil One and all the evil practices that he promotes, and to help us to stay firmly committed and consecrated to Jesus and His Word of Truth.

The Rite of Ordination is powerful both in the profoundly beautiful prayers as well as in the meaningful actions. My dear Son, in just a few moments you will make 6 very important promises: 1) to fulfill your Office of Priesthood with me your Bishop in unity; 2) to proclaim God's Word faithfully; 3) to celebrate the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, worthily; 4) to pray for the Church and for your people regularly; 5) to consecrate yourself to God completely; and to promise respect and obedience to me, and my Successor (whoever that might be???) consistently. Those are not easy promises to make or to keep, UNLESS we are completely united with Christ, and ONLY when you open yourself to the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit.

After you make these 6 promises, then comes the dramatic act of Prostration---the act which demonstrates your willingness to give your life completely in service to Christ and His Church. It's really a symbolic way of saying that you are willing to die to self, so that when you rise, you do so in the image of Christ Himself Who also emptied Himself completely to align His Will to that of the Father, and to pour out His very life for the salvation of all humanity. And during that time when you are laying prostrate on the Cathedral floor, all of us----your family, friends, your new brother priests, and those for whom you will soon be their Priest----we will all be right here with you, praying intently for the intercession of all the Saints to guard and fortify you; we will also be praying for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that you will be up to the challenges of being a Priest of Jesus Christ.

This Prostration is also a sign that the life of a Priest is one of absolute Service in the example of Christ, Who got down on His hands and knees to wash the feet of His Apostles,

and told us that what He has done, so we must do as well. As you lay prostrate, please remember what it is that you are being called to do---what great privilege is being given to you---what the world desperately needs to see in you (whether they realize it or not). And when you rise up from the Floor, and through the laying on of Hands, you will be essentially, profoundly and eternally changed into “another Christ”.

One other exceptionally important part of the Ordination Rite will take place immediately after the Prayer of Ordination when I will consecrate your hands with Sacred Chrism. This will not be the first time you have been anointed with Sacred Chrism, Jacob. You were first anointed with Chrism on the crown of your infant head way back in 1992 on the day of your Baptism. That’s when you became a part of the Body of Christ, an adopted child of God; that’s when you received the first “call” to live a life of holiness. The second time you were anointed with Sacred Chrism was on the day of your Confirmation, when the Bishop anointed your forehead with those beautiful words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”. That’s when you were called into a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus to be a “witness”, to live your Faith with courage, and to be fortified by the Strength of the Spirit to overcome any challenges you encounter in your life of Faith. And today, for the third time, you will be yet again anointed with Sacred Chrism, as your hands are consecrated----made holy---so that what you do with your hands, those you touch, and all you bless will be as though Jesus Himself is doing, touching, blessing and being present to all you encounter.

Being anointed with Sacred Chrism has called you into deeper and more significant levels of loving relationships with our Lord Jesus. First, to a life of holiness, in Baptism; then to be a witness for Christ, a martyr for the Faith in Confirmation. Today, as your hands are anointed with Sacred Chrism, you are being called to the most awesome, deepest level of relationship with our Lord Jesus: to be “*alter Christus*”----to be joined with “*the Christos*,” “*the Anointed One*”--- for others. You are being anointed, consecrated, and set apart so that you can bring others to holiness and to help guide them to live lives of courageous Faith.

As the recent document on Priestly Formation expressed so beautifully, which incorporates many of Pope Francis’ insights on priesthood: “*Priests are ‘missionary disciples’ who are to be ‘in love with the Master, Shepherds with the ‘smell of the sheep’, who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.*” What that says, dear son in the Lord, and what it should also say to all of us priests, is that our “formation” is never completed; we are always growing. Or as St. Paul put it so well in our 2nd Reading today: we need to “*be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone.*”

Today, our priests need to be gentle and loving Shepherds in the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd, caring for those who are making efforts to practice the Faith; but we also need to be creative Evangelizers, in the example of Jesus Who constantly was seeking out those who were lost, those on the margins, those who were vulnerable and felt worthless, so He could bring them safely home. We are to be Shepherds of the Sheep and Fishers of Men.

As a priest, you will stand with your people who are grieving the death of loved ones; you will administer the Sacrament of the Sick to people who are terminally ill or suffering in body or spirit; you will hear the Confessions of sinners who have lost their way, gone off track, or just missed the mark. You will be standing in the midst of the evils of our world, needing to prophetically challenge those evils, while at the same time, being a voice of comfort, encouragement and hope so our people do not become misled or overly discouraged.

To be able to do all that is asked of you, Jacob, or any of us priests, we must make these 3 critically important commitments: 1) we must be true to our promises of our Ordination, and renew them every morning when we start our day and every night before we go to bed; 2) we must be men of prayer who have a deep and personal Love for Jesus our Lord, who find daily inspiration through God's Holy Word, and who faithfully celebrate the Sacraments; 3) and we must align our wills to that of the Will of God, and be obedient to the voice of God that speaks through our Bishops. And most of all, as I said after you were "chosen" a few moments ago, we must: *"Rely(ing) on the help of the Lord God and of our Savior Jesus Christ"*.

My dear son in the Lord, on this Vigil of Pentecost, you are about to become a Priest of Jesus Christ. You can take comfort, knowing that our Loving and Faithful God is with you, in the same way He was with the Apostles and the Blessed Mother as they waited for the Holy Spirit's descent upon them on the first Vigil of Pentecost. Inspired by the deep faith and trust of our Blessed Mother, whose constant refrain was what she first said to the Archangel Gabriel: *"Let it be done to me as you say"/ "Fiat"*, and encouraged by the example of those first Apostles who were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, I urge you to follow Mary's and the Apostles' example; open your heart always to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and embrace this precious Gift of Priesthood so that, as St. Paul said so well, *"you can save both yourself and those who listen to you."* And you can be absolutely certain that Jesus will be faithful to His promise of praying His prayer for you: to protect you from the Evil One, and to consecrate you in His Truth.

And so we pray: *"Come, Holy Spirit! Veni Sancte Spiritus! Ven Espiritu Santo!* Fill the heart of our brother and your son, Jacob, with your powerful Gifts! Send him forth to preach your Word with conviction and with courage! Together in Faith, you Jacob, united with our Lord Jesus: *"Et renovabis faciem Terrae"*(Latin); *"Y renovarás la faz de la tierra"* (Spanish); *"and may You renew the face of the Earth"!* (English)