

Diaconate Ordination of Andrew Schmidt
May 20, 2023 St. Augustine Cathedral
(Readings: Acts 6:1-7b; Ps.23; 2 Cor.4:1-2,5-7; Mt.20: 25-28)

BEGINNING OF MASS—WORDS OF WELCOME:

What a joyful day for all of us here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo on this Vigil of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord.

Welcome, one and all—all those present here; those joining us virtually.

Welcome to members of Deacon-Elect's home parish of St. Joseph in St. Joseph; to his friends and relatives; and in a special way to the members of Andy's immediate family: his proud parents, Jason and Julie, and to his younger sister Katie and her brand new husband Ben.

Special welcome to our visiting Deacon Rev. Mr. Nicholas Brown, of the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Welcome to all our Seminarians who are serving here for this Ordination Mass

Welcome to all our own Deacons and Priests here with us today, and in a special way, to Fr. Stephen Pullis representing the Faculty and Administration of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, where Andy and our Seminarians are so well-formed and prepared for ministry.

And of course a very special welcome to our Deacon-Elect Andrew Jay Schmidt on this, the day of his Ordination.

It's so wonderful for all of us to be joined together for this Mass as we celebrate our Faith in the Risen Lord Who remains always with us here in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

And so, let us prepare ourselves to celebrate Jesus' abiding Presence with us by calling to mind our sins.....

Homily:

PRAISED BE JESUS CHRIST!

Throughout these six weeks of the Easter Season, we have been attentively listening to the development of the Early Christian Community as faithfully recorded by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Immediately after Pentecost, the Spirit-filled Apostles began proclaiming to all the people—Jews first, then the Gentiles—the Good News of the Risen Jesus. And the number of believers grew exponentially.

So, it's interesting to notice that one of the very first challenges that this early Community encountered was what we heard in this morning's First Reading—while the Apostles were busy about peaching the Word and encouraging people to live together as one big Family of Faith, they discovered that the community had real human needs that they weren't prepared to address: the care of the widows and orphans; providing for their material needs of food and clothing and care. So, after prayerful consideration, they created this new group of faith-filled men who would be charged by the Apostles with this particular ministry. And after the community proposed seven men who were "*reputable men, filled with the Spirit and Wisdom*", the Apostles "*prayed and laid hands on them*", and the first Order within the Sacrament of Holy Orders was established to fulfill the ministry of the Word and of Charity.

And throughout the Church's lifetime, through the Sacrament of Holy Orders—Deacons, Priests and Bishops—God's Word is preached, the Community of Faith is nurtured and cared for, and the Kingdom of God continues to grow. This first Rank in the Sacrament of Holy Orders focuses on the essential role of "Service". While priests and Bishops are also dedicated to "service" in the example of Christ, this ministry of Service, along with the ministry of the Word, are foundational to what it means to be an ordained Deacon.

In just a few moments, Andy, before I do that very same act as the Apostles did of solemnly "*laying hands on you*" in the Act of Ordination, you will be asked to make seven, very significant, promises. Basically, you are promising: 1) to commit your life to Celibacy; 2) to ground your life in Prayer; and 3) to live a life of Obedience to Christ through your Bishop. And in these Promises, you are consciously and freely giving yourself in Service to the Church.

1. Celibacy is too often understood in the "negative"—we mostly think of Celibacy in terms of what you can not do, that is, that you cannot get married and enjoy the love of a spouse in the normal human ways. However, it's so important for us to focus more on what Celibacy allows you to do, and Who you become free to be. Through the Gift of Celibacy, you enter into a relationship with Christ and His Church that is indeed "spousal"; you commit your entire self—

-mind, body, and spirit—to a permanent, intimate, sacramental union with Jesus. And that *spousal relationship* allows you to be free to go wherever the Lord calls you to go, to give yourself to whomever you are sent to serve. And it is this spousal Love that you Promise today that allows you to put aside everyone and everything else so that you can follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The Promise to be a man of “Prayer” is a commitment to nurture and grow in the relationship you already have established with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—through all the years of formation that have led up to this day of Diaconate Ordination. Of course we all know that your Formation didn’t just begin for you in the Seminary, did it Andy? We know that Prayer has been an essential component in the “Domestic Church” of the Schmidt Family home, led by the example of your dear parents.

As I’m sure many of you know, Andy’s birthday was just yesterday---he turned a ripe old 26 years old. (I’m not sure I even remember turning 26???) So your birthday, May 19, 1997 is a very important day---especially to your Mom and Dad, and now to all those of us who have come to know and love you. But the far more important day, even more important than your birthday, is June 29, 1997---that was the Day of your Baptism when Father Jim Morris baptized you, and you became a Child of God. And on that day, Andy, God began to “call” you to become one of His holy priests. It just took you a few years for you to actually hear that call, and then to make the arrangements to begin to formally respond to that call. Through all your faith formation throughout the years as you were growing up, and the Sacraments you received, you became more aware of what it means to be a Child of God. And then came that very special day in October---October 2, 2011---the day of your Confirmation. I don’t know too many Bishops that are as blessed as I am to be able to say that a young man that I am about to Ordain was also the same young man I Confirmed ----but Andy, I get to say that about you. And while I might like to think that had something to do with “inspiring” you to consider a priestly vocation, we both know----we all know----that it’s been the Holy Spirit you received on that important day many years ago Who has been guiding you, and *en-couraging* you, to respond to His promptings in your heart that led you to begin pursuing formation for Holy Orders. Over these last years of Seminary formation at which you have excelled, you have clearly become a more intentional man of Prayer. And today, you promise to make Prayer—your daily/regular communication with Jesus Himself—an essential and life-giving part of your daily life.

During the Retreat this past week with all the Priests of our Diocese—during which we all prayed for you, Andy, each day—I was reading a book by Cardinal Sarah entitled *“For Eternity: Restoring the Priesthood and our Spiritual Fatherhood”*. Cardinal Sarah wrote this about Prayer: *“To pray is not to recite prayer or one’s breviary hastily, and so to speak, mechanically. To pray is to prostrate oneself before God in a silence of awe and wonders, to adore Him and to tell Him that we love Him, to thank Him for all His benefits, to sing His glory and exalt His saving power on behalf of mankind.”*

In just a few moments, after Andy is asked to make these solemn Promises, he will do what Cardinal Sarah just described. He will “prostrate himself” on our Cathedral floor, both before God, and before all of us, in a physical expression of his complete gift of self to God and the Church, to be a man of Prayer, espoused to Christ, and giving himself for the needs of all.

3. And that brings us to the Promise of Obedience. While some people think that Celibacy is the greatest challenge to faithfully live, it may very well be the Promise of Obedience that is the bigger challenge. And yet, it is this Virtue of pledging oneself to live a life of Christ-like obedience, that opens us up to a new life of genuine freedom. While that may sound like a contradiction, we know that there was no One more “free” than Jesus, and that was because He constantly was seeking to do whatever the Father’s Will for Him was. Obedience is not easy, as it wasn’t easy for Jesus. We know that in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday night, Jesus begged His Father to *“take this Cup away from Me”*; but He always added: *“Yet, not My Will, but Thy Will be done”*. All of us who are baptized promise to be obedient in following God’s Will; we promise to avoid sin and be faithful to God by living a virtuous life. But for those in Holy Orders, which beginning today includes you, my dear brother Andy, we also pledge Obedience to our Bishop, who we trust, is guided in his decisions by the Holy Spirit. Giving up our own personal choices and decisions in favor of what the Bishop chooses for me, or decides on my behalf, is challenging. But I can assure you from my own lived experience, saying “yes” in a spirit of obedience opens up wonderful new opportunities in God’s Divine Plan for you to follow, if you choose to see those moments in that way.

As you consider these 7 Solemn Promises, try to hear them in the context of this morning’s beautiful Second Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians. These 7 Promises are ways for you to safeguard the “treasure” of our Faith, which has been entrusted to each of us, even though in our humanness, we are like “earthen vessels”; we are fragile, and at times weak. So today, Andy, we pray for you in a particular way that you will safeguard that “treasure” that has

been given to you, so that whatever “power” your ministry as a Deacon may have, will be clearly seen to be “*from God and not from us*”. And we know that because, again as St. Paul said so well, we are not to be “*preaching ourselves, but Jesus Christ our Lord*”...so that we can share the “*knowledge of the glory of God*” and to shine the “*Light on the Face of Jesus’ Love for us and all the world*”.

In today’s Gospel---which at this point in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus is close to Jerusalem and drawing to the end of His public ministry---“Jesus *summoned His disciples*” once more. Jesus was the greatest “Formator” possible. His disciples walked with Him, learned to pray from Him; watched Him care for the crowds; observed first-hand His miracles and healings; listened intently to everything He said and did. But on this occasion, He wanted to teach them what it means to be “great”---really and truly great. There’s a kind-of longing in the human heart for “greatness” — for “excellence”——for “recognition”. But Jesus has a completely different understanding of what “greatness” means. “*Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.*” As always, Jesus’ reality is opposite of what our basic human nature experiences. For Jesus, to be “great” means to be a “servant”. And not just to be a normal, average servant, but to serve unquestionably, unconditionally, even to the point of “*giving your life as a ransom for many*”.

As Cardinal Sarah also wrote so beautifully in the book I mentioned earlier: “The priest’s soul is the soul of servant. That is why no one can be a priest without being a deacon. In order to make present Christ *the Shepherd*, it is necessary first to make present Christ *the Servant*.” (P. 62)

Dear soon-to-be Deacon Andrew, you are being ordained in the midst of some challenging times in our world. And yet, the Mission of the Church, that Jesus first gave on the Day of His Ascension, which we celebrate tomorrow, remains the same Mission for the Church today—to “*go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News, and to baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” Your responsibility as a Deacon remains the same as it was for the very first Deacons: to be a “*reputable man, filled with the Spirit and wisdom*”, to be ordained for the Service of Word and Charity for all to whom you will minister; to be “one who serves” in the example of Christ, the Servant of all.

The world desperately longs to hear the Good News of the Gospel that you will preach, even if it doesn’t realize that they need it.

Through the intercession of our dear Blessed Mother, and St. Augustine our Diocesan Patron, may you, Deacon Andrew, and all of us, be given the Grace we need to be faithful to our vocations, and to bear witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest. May everything we do, and all that we say, give glory and praise to Him, now and forever. Amen.

At the end of Mass:

- Now that Deacon Andrew has been ordained, it's customary to notify him of his first Assignment as a Deacon for the summer time. However, Andy has made it known that he has a great desire to become fluent in his ability to speak Spanish, so that he can minister more capably to the growing number of Hispanic/Latino Catholics in our Diocese.
- En esa luz, querido Andy, Te enviamos a Guadalajara, México, a estudiar y aprender Español durante diez semanas.
- Y Volver a proclamar la Buena Noticia del Señor Resucitado a una porción de la diócesis que anhela escuchar el mensaje de salvación y crecer en el amor a Dios y al prójimo.
- WHICH MEANS:
- In that light, dear Andy, we are sending you to Guadalajara, Mexico, to study Spanish and immerse yourself in the language and culture for 10 weeks. So that, upon your return, you will be better equipped to proclaim the Good News to a portion of the Diocese longing to hear the message of salvation, and to grow in the Love of God. So, on this very happy day, we Congratulate you, and we promise you our prayers for blessings and many graces during these next 10 weeks. Vaya con Dios!