

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
for the Ordination to the Priesthood
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
Saturday, May 15, 2021**

Acts 10: 37-43; Eph 4: 1-7, 11:23; Jn 15: 15b; Jn 15: 9-17

Pope Francis has said we need to find God in this terrible pandemic, which has afflicted us all for so long. He uses the image of an overflow, like great rivers when they rise and spillover. God's overflowing mercy is visible in the many creative responses to the suffering of this ongoing crisis. Today's ordination taking place at the Magna Cathedral of St. Augustine on the eve of the Ascension of the Lord is an overflow of grace spilling out from the love of Christ for us.

We are very blessed by the aura of Easter still permeating in mid-May. The reading of Acts shows St. Peter representing the Apostles in the bold proclamation of the paschal message: The Crucified Jesus of Nazareth is alive – he is the Lord and Savior of us all. These new priests are dedicating their entire lives to building a church that is born from the paschal mystery of the Risen Lord. When we make this proclamation, we all know that it sets people's hearts on fire as they encounter the Risen Lord. Only the Lord renders true love available, a love that brings deep acceptance, peace in our heart, and true joy that is more lasting than pleasure and entertainment.

The church is focused on the kerygma proclamation. The constant reference to the paschal mystery does not provide pre-packaged answers. It doesn't try to prove anything nor seek answers to doubters. It simply offers companionship on the way. The simple witnessing of being loved by the Father, along with others who have found peace and joy in their lives, reflecting the beauty of knowing Jesus anew.

“The image of the first Christian communities in the Acts of the Apostles clearly shows us that the kerygma comes first in importance, for it is the heart of the Gospel” (Pope Francis, September 21, 2019, Address). A new priest should not be referred to as a progressive or a conservative, for he is not about spreading an ideology, a trend, reflecting a particular group or blog. Rather the priest should be known for his passion for leading others to Christ the Lord and his church as the Apostles did through the power of the Spirit.

Virtuous friendships are great blessings in our journey of life. One of my best friends lives in Europe, and I have not had a real visit with her for many years. In her notes, to me, she always ends them by saying: Remember me in the *Per Ipsum*. The Eucharistic Doxology is a prime time of the Mass. For the priest concludes the consecratory eucharistic prayer offering the *Christus Totus* (head and body) to the Trinity and sealed with a resounding heartfelt Marian “Amen!” As a priest celebrates a Mass, he is celebrating it over the whole world, embracing all creation. How well Sister Miriam of the Holy Spirit, poet Jessica Powers, states it: “Praise to the Father and the Son and to the Spirit! May I be O Water, Wave and Tide in One Thine animate doxology.”

The heart of the celebrating priest experienced at the Doxology experiences a profound moment of integration and meaning. The whole purpose of evangelization, catechesis, apologetics,

teaching, the entire missionary activity is to lead the faithful to the summit of the Eucharist where the priest, as an existential sacrament of the paschal mystery, making the paschal church present and visible.

St. Augustine simplified this by saying the Mass is the *mysterium pietatis*, *signum unitatis*, *vinculum caritatis*. By making the Eucharist available, the priest enables the faithful and (himself) to experience the unity of the faith, the communion of hearts lived in fellowship, the exchange of gifts that fraternal love brings about, irradiating an abundance of joy and peace for all. Needless to say, the fruits of fraternity, peace, and joy are not self-contained in a sort of ghetto, but they are spread out to society, validating the Vatican II image of the church as the sacrament of humanity, a sacrament to the world.

The sacrament of holy orders taking place here today is a grace and a moment of gratitude and thanksgiving. I give thanks for these very talented men who have opened their lives to the Lord's unique and personal call to become shepherds of the grand Shepherd our Lord Jesus Christ. By grace, they are open, and it is the Lord of history who chose them for a very "fruitful" life as long as their plans are aligned to the mind of the church expressed today by their promise of mature obedience. Priestly obedience is manifested by a capacity of teamwork, collaboration, availability to service, and openness in communication. Jesus promises his loving friendship to his priests, sharing his heart if we remain in his love and truth.

Priestly celibacy, when freely recognized as a personal grace given by the Spirit for the apostolic mission, becomes a source of happiness both for the priest and especially for others. This total giving of the disciple to the heart of Christ translates into self-giving love for others in the same dynamics of the trinitarian outpouring of self for the other in mutuality, creating new life and greater incarnate selfless love.

It is a blessing that this ordination takes place in the Year of St. Joseph, a year of such outpouring of distinctive graces. We implore St. Joseph always to be a father to Fathers Mac, Mike, and Michael and their brother ordinandi or classmates here present. May, all our fathers in our families and priests, bishops and deacons, find a real inspiration as they frequently go to St. Joseph, drawing from the school of Nazareth many practical lessons about prayer, work, and building community.

St. John Paul II boldly called Mary "the Eucharistic woman." In fact, the Lord's body and blood were the fruit of both the Holy Spirit and the openness and consent of the Immaculate Mary. Her fiat was given at the incarnation of the Word, the redeeming act of the Cross, and Pentecost as Mother of the church. May the Mother of the Lord keep our new priests very close to her immaculate heart. Our Lady of La Leche, as we prepare our hearts for the solemn canonical coronation that will take place in this Cathedral on her feast next October 10, we rejoice with you Mother Mary because as we gaze with love on you, we experience you as our Queen of Heaven rejoicing with your Son, the victorious King and Lord. Amen.