

Ordinations to the Priesthood
Priests of the Holy Cross
Sacred Heart Basilica
University of Notre Dame
April 18, 2009

Vince, Charlie and Aaron, a little more than six months ago the three of you made your final vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in this Congregation of the Holy Cross. In so many ways it was a “leap of faith” by which you gave yourselves to God and this community for good. Today the community proudly presents you for priestly ordination, confident that in your religious and priestly formation, you have taken to heart these words from Blessed Basil Moreau: “We must be ‘all things to all people,’ like St. Paul – little with the little, great with the great, seeing in all only the image of God imprinted within them like a sacred seal which you must preserve at all costs.”

Ordained ministry is a great privilege but also a formidable challenge. The story is told of an African boy who listened carefully as his teacher explained why Christians give presents to each other on Christmas Day. She told the youngster, “The gift is an expression of our joy over the birth of Jesus and our friendship for one another.” And so when Christmas came, the boy brought the teacher a beautiful seashell. She asked him, “Where did you ever find such a beautiful shell?” The boy told her that there was only one spot where such extraordinary shells could be found. It was a place several miles away and the teacher was quite amazed. She said, “Why, it is gorgeous, beautiful, but you should not have gone all that way to get such a gift for me.” The little boy’s eyes brightened and he said, “Long walk part of gift.”

That, my dear brothers, is the way it was with Jesus. And so it must be with you. The Son of God came from heaven to a manger, from a manger to a cross, from a cross to a grave, and from a grave back to heaven. People ask, “Why all this trouble?” And God says, “Long walk part of gift.” Jesus Christ

walked the way we walk. As ordained ministers, you too must walk the way the people walk, like them, experiencing the fullness of life, the joys and the sorrows, the friendship and the alienation, the dying and the rising. If you do this, the hope in our hearts on this ordination day during the octave of Easter is not without foundation. Your long walk with the people you are called to serve will be a big part of your gift.

So much of today's celebration speaks still of Easter. The gospel, the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the beautiful environment here at Sacred Heart Basilica, the Alleluias on our tongues and in our hearts, all remind us of the marvelous events of the paschal mystery which the church continues to celebrate.

But today's gospel reminds us how hard it was for Christ's friends at first to believe that he had truly risen, so deep was their hurt and shame. Yet, in spite of their slowness of heart and mind, Jesus still entrusts to them his precious mission and tells them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." Many would say that Jesus called them in spite of their weaknesses. I would join those who say that he called them because of these weaknesses, so that through them the glory and power of God might shine all the more brightly. If your own sense of inadequacy still haunts you, take courage. You won't walk alone.

Today's first reading from the Book of the Acts tells us something about those first apostles that you must remember as you begin your own priestly ministry. We were told that Peter and John said, "It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." What transformed them from such fearful friends still hiding in the upper room to the bold zealots who were not deterred by those who came to order them to leave the synagogue? Obviously it was the gift of the Holy Spirit, conferred upon them at Pentecost,

the gift of the Spirit which will be yours again in even more wonderful ways through the sacrament of priestly ordination which you are about to receive.

My brothers, today the church prays fervently that like those first apostles, you too will find it impossible not to speak about all you have seen and heard as disciples of the Lord. Pope Benedict talks a lot about joy. He himself radiates joy, as we experienced during his pastoral visit at this time last year. If he were here today he would be telling you that announcing and bearing witness to joy should be at the very heart of your mission. To collaborate in the joy of other people in a world that is much too sad and much too negative, the fire of the gospel must burn within you and the joy of the Lord must live in you.

Priesthood is a gift, for you, yes, but also for God's people. As St. Paul told Timothy in today's second reading, "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate." Our brother priests will join me in imposing hands upon you, a beautiful sign of our fraternity as servant ministers of the evangelizing mission of the church. Vince, Charlie and Aaron, you have found a happy home in Holy Cross. The diversity of your own interests and experiences will certainly enrich Holy Cross and the presbyterates where you will serve. From what I've learned about you men, to supplement your priestly duties, by this time next year Aaron will be out running with the toros, Charlie will be hobnobbing with local Oregon politicians and scrimmaging with our revived Trailblazers, and Vince's culinary talents will be on display at the taste of Colorado. Whatever it takes, keep some balance and personal delights in your life. Ministry is hard work.

Before accepting the gift of ordination, do take a moment to reflect upon what you are about to receive. Through Baptism you, like all of us here today, became sharers in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. But as Christ himself

chose certain disciples to carry out publicly in his name a priestly office in the church, so we now today choose you. Ordained priests are established coworkers of the order of bishops, exercising the ministries of teacher, priest and shepherd. In your person you yourself are being configured to Christ the eternal high priest. You must preach the gospel wisely, shepherd God's people lovingly and celebrate the sacred liturgy reverently and prayerfully, especially the Eucharist.

When you were ordained deacons last year you were reminded to take to heart the teachings of Christ as reflected in Scripture and the tradition of the church. Holy Cross is a community of teachers. But good teachers know that their words go only so far. In the end, it will be your priestly example, your love for those entrusted to your pastoral care, like the love you have experienced during your time of spiritual formation, that will build up the church of God.

Perhaps your greatest privilege and joy as a priest in the local churches where it will be your call to serve will be the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, a moment in time when you will provide God's people with the spiritual nourishment they all need on their journey of faith. Through the sacrament of Reconciliation you will also have the privilege of putting to death whatever is sinful in your people's hearts and helping them walk in the newness of life. You will welcome others into the church through the sacraments of Initiation. You will comfort the sick with holy oil and in your prayer through the hours of each day you will have in your heart the needs of the people and the glory of God. I thank you Vince, Charlie and Aaron, for heeding this call and responding with your whole heart and your whole soul.

Here on this magnificent campus we are surrounded by all kinds of talented and generous young people who fill our hearts with hope. But, like the rest of us, sometimes they don't seem to have a clue about some of the

treasures already in their possession. I heard about a young student who came up to a priest full of excitement at her discovery of Buddhism and her desire to convert. The priest said, “Well, what would you think of a religion that said that God became everything that we are, so that we might become everything that God is?” She thought it was a fantastic idea. She asked, “What is this marvelous religion?” And the priest said, “Christianity!”

Yes, my brothers, that is the good news about our God that you are called to proclaim, by word, by deed and by your very person. The long walk, like that of Jesus, has already led you to embrace this conviction about faith in Jesus Christ and, as Holy Cross priests, to keep your gaze on him crucified. In this regard, it’s only fitting for me today to let your blessed founder have the last word, “In order to follow Jesus, it is necessary to deny self and carry one’s cross. If we follow Jesus and carry our cross, we will have life. Life is to be found in the Cross and nowhere else.”