

My dear brothers and sisters, today we gather together to witness a sacred event in the life of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Today, by the laying on of Bishop Iker's hands, the Holy Spirit will be imparted to one of our own for the work and ministry of a priest. Today, we offer to God a man that he may be ordained - ushered into an order of men with sacred power — his hands consecrated and his life set apart - that the Lord may give him back to us, a living sign of Christ among us.

It is important that we not miss this essential piece of today's event. We are witnessing a sacrifice. Joseph will offer not only his hands, but his whole body, his whole life over to Jesus to be used by Him for a new work. Well, new for him, but old for many of us, and quite old when you consider the Church throughout time. By this making of a gift of himself, and indeed by the gift which the Church makes of his life, he is offered back to us, a man with something he did not have before.

I do not want you to miss the enormity of that as we witness this.

Today, a parish will offer one of her own sons for ministry to the whole Church. Today, a mother and father will offer their son to the Lord, and he will become a father to many.

Today, a bride and her son will offer their husband and father, respectively, and they will sacrifice over and over again for the sake of priestly ministry.

Today, a man offers his neck to the divine yoke. There will be times when this yoke is a joy. There will be times when it will involve immense suffering, even the temptation to give it all up, but this yoke is not something which can be put down. It is permanent, a yoke taken up today, which will bind this man to a life of sacrifice. We pray today that he will, by the Lord's grace, be able to bear it.

Yes, today, we witness a sacrifice at the altar of God.

There will be times when all will feel this loss, the acute pain of this gift. And, perhaps above all, there will be times when Joseph himself will feel the enormity of the gift he makes this day. From this day forward, Joseph Francis will sacrifice his private ambitions, his private life, his own body, his own voice, his own life to the priestly service of the Crucified. His life will no longer be his own. It will belong to Jesus.

Indeed, it has always belonged to Jesus, because everything belongs to Jesus. That's the funny thing about sacrifice, it's perhaps the funniest part of the liturgy: "All things come from thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given Thee." It is both

obvious, but also a paradox, perplexing, challenging our deepest held yet false presumptions about the true state of things. Every priest needs to be daily reminded of this: the people he serves are not his own. The parish he serves is not his own. They belong to Jesus. And if that priest wants to serve the people well, he will not look down, but up. He will not look at solving the manifold problems and controversies in the parish that will no doubt plague him as the primary means to accomplishing good ministry - NO! God forbid it! He will make a daily offering of himself to Jesus, who is the very ideal of the priest, because He alone is worthy and all else is idolatry.

That is the what of the priesthood. It is little more than the Church of God offering a man of their own to Jesus, and Jesus taking this man to himself for the benefit of the Church, His Bride. This is what apostolic ministry *is* - a man being **called from** and **sent to**, who in taking up the call of Jesus sacrifices his own life for the sake of Christ's body. Jesus says to his disciples on the morning of his glorious Resurrection: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (John 20:21) That "even so" is the Greek word καθὼς, meaning "in the same way as" or "inasmuch as." It is the same word that forms the word Catholic, as in "according to the whole." It tells us that those likewise sent by the Lord Jesus are sent just as he was, in the flesh, to present God's people before the majesty of God, holy and redeemed, to sacrifice His very life for their benefit, as Paul puts it with regard to husbands: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-27 RSV)

That is what needs to be said today, in a nutshell, and they are summed up in the readings for today, all of which point us to Jesus.

In the Gospel reading, we read that Mary's son will be called Emmanuel, God with us. The Divine Son is not sent in the abstract, or in the manner of pure spirit, but to be Incarnate in the flesh, flesh taken from a human mother. The Church Fathers tell us that this not just a function of God wanting to be a perfect exemplar or a good influence on us wayward people. No! The Incarnation is as Athanasius put it "God becom[ing] man that we might become God." The high priest Jesus is not one unable to sympathize with human weakness, but one who in every way has been tempted as we are.

In like manner, Jesus has sent men into the world, not in the abstract, and not as purely spiritual beings, but as flesh and blood, liable to temptation, acquainted with weakness. Today we should take great comfort that that early apostolic band was filled with the likes of Peter or Paul, men chosen not for their perfection, but for their obedience to the Lord's command.

The priest is, first and foremost, a man, just as Jesus, the great high priest is a man.

He must be able to sympathize with weakness, be patient with sinners (in truth, he must love sinners!). He must not sit in an ivory tower or pontificate on Facebook from a computer screen. He must be among the people, where they are. Canon Heidt asked the congregation on the day I was ordained: "Why should people have to go to a church to find a priest? Why can't they find him equally in a pub?" We should not be surprised to find that our priests have a public ministry. Why? Because the ministry of Jesus was public, and not one verse of the Gospels ever says he had an office. His office was that of a priest, and so should ours be! And a priest is one who is *among* the people.

The second thing which needs to be said today is that the priest is a shepherd, who leads his people to glory, the glory of the beatific vision. Why? Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who leads his people to glory, to the beatific vision, which by the way, he beholds with his human eyes at the right hand of the Father at this very moment. It is from that priestly beholding of the majesty of God that all priestly ministry issues forth - Jesus beholding the perfect glory of the Father, making constant intercession, models for his priests the perfect priestly life.

The reading from Micah today states: "he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth."

He shall stand. What does that mean? It means that a shepherd does not lie down when there are wolves attacking. He does not sleep and he does not get distracted. He stands watch. His position is not that of weakness, but of the biblical virtue of meekness. Meekness does not mean cowardice. It means, put simply, that he is a man who is capable in battle, but does not resort to harshness and violence easily. Instead, he keeps his sword sheathed until the necessary time, and when that comes, he is not to be messed with.

We have often, and especially in recent months, witnessed a priesthood characterized by cowardice and weakness. And, as Jordan Peterson has said "If

you're worried about what powerful men can do, you should see what weak men are capable of." The old ordination rites charge the ordinand to "be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word; and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole." The strong priest, I should say, the meek priest, knows when to use such admonitions and exhortations, he knows precisely when to take on heresy and when he does, he uses a sharp intellect, a steel will, and he encourages the people he serves to do the same.

The Shepherd feeds his people. How does Jesus feed his people? Through the proclamation of the Divine Word and the Holy Sacraments. Joseph, if you feed people yourself, they will die of hunger. If you feed them Jesus, you'll see marriages healed, the sick brought to wholeness and strength, sinners come to faith, and you'll see parishes full of people head-over-heels in love with Jesus, and Lord, we could certainly use more of those. So, proclaim the Holy Scriptures with passion, precision, and power. The only thing worse than a preacher who is unprepared is a preacher who doesn't care. Catechize the people you serve, teaching them the ways of Christian believing, prayer, and living. Hone that skill, and you'll have parishes with people who can feed and make disciples of others. But, do not forget, this power to shepherd the people of God comes not from you, but from the Lord.

Above all else, you will stand at the altar tomorrow, and for the rest of your life, you will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving for the living and the dead. Do you know what this means? It means that a priest is a priest not just of the living, but of the dead as well. When you pray the mass, and please - pray it! - go with the names of the faithful departed on your lips. When you preach, fill your preaching with the aroma of the saints of ages past. This is a way of loving the dead and feeding the living. That's what tradition is all about.

At that altar, and from that altar, you will feed the people in the most magnificent way possible - you will feed them God himself.

Why must the priest be a good shepherd? Because good shepherds, good pastors, lead their people to glory, to the security and everlasting peace of the beatific vision. Good shepherds lead people, in word and example, to renounce sin, to make peace, to be merciful, to mourn for sinners, to bear persecution humbly and obediently, and to make a continual sacrifice of themselves. Good shepherds make leaders. They equip for ministry. They build up the body of Christ.

Above all, the priest is to labor for the sanctification of the Church's members. He hears their confessions. He offers strong spiritual direction for which he has labored in continual reading and study. He preaches for conversion. He seeks to conform his life to Jesus, so that others can do the same. To put it simply - he is a man on mission - the Mission of Jesus to love and save lost humanity - and he is not the Maytag repairman, sitting around waiting for the phone to ring. As long as there are sinners, the business of the priest will be booming. As long as he feeds the flock, he'll have plenty of good grazing land. And as long as he is truly among the people, Jesus will be there with him, drawing the whole world to Himself.

Just as the priest sacrifices his life to the Lord, he sacrifices his life for the people he serves. And let me make that very, very clear.

My dear brother and friend, would you please stand?

Today, I bid you to take courage. You have no mission but that of Jesus. No mission but that of Jesus. No priesthood but that of Jesus. He can never be a better priest than He is, and you can never have more power or more ability than that which He gives you this very day. As you give yourself to Him, He gives himself to you. That's how the priesthood works.

Do not be astonished at your own weakness - but ask for the grace of Jesus.

But, for heaven's sake - don't be a wimp!

Become fluent in the language and content of Holy Scripture. If ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ as Saint Jerome says, your ignorance of Scripture will not help people know Jesus.

Pray the mass as often as you can. Don't just celebrate, but on your day off, attend the mass, maybe at another parish. You are saved by the very same things your people will be saved by, so not only do that, but keep making your confession.

Look to your bishop for pastoral care. You know, I recently decided that it wasn't right that the bishop has so little to do, and so I decided to do something about it. I made up my mind that I would call upon our dear bishop to bless our new house, to baptize our children, to pray for me, and I'll admit, I haven't been good about it, but we priests need a faithful pastor, and we have one!

Be a faithful priest to your family. You'll be no kind of father to the people of God if you can't be a good father to your own children. As Paul puts it, if a man does not provide for his family, "he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Never apologize for putting your family first, because God knows they will sacrifice you time and time again for the sake of the Church. If your family suffers, you will suffer. If your family doesn't have your attention, the hearts of the fathers of the men you serve will never be turned to their children and our crisis of dwindling fatherhood and dying masculinity will be worse than ever. So take your day off, take your month of vacation, and be home for dinner. I should say - workaholic priests should not be praised. They are usually egoists and shamefully arrogant of their own abilities.

And Claire - you have my permission to beat him over the head with all of this when necessary.

Many people claim that clerical celibacy is a good thing - many of them are married to priests. I've never found that. My wife and my family are not a liability to me. The Lord has given them to me to keep me sane, healthy, and grounded. In that vein, you'll do well to listen to your wife and heed her advice.

From this day forward, people will call you father. That term is not an honorific or a title. Originally, it was a term of endearment. So, don't think that you deserve it. To the extent that you encourage, teach, build up, and embolden the saints, you'll be called father, and the people will truly mean it, because they will truly love you.

Carry an oil stock and a stole wherever you go. From this day forth, you'll never be off-duty and you'll never be relieved of the authority to heal the sick and forgive sins.

Above all, get serious about prayer and the life of holiness. Because here's the deal: from this day forward, the devil will paint a target on your back. He loves winning over priests and because of this, the roads to hell are paved with their skulls. Pray, pray, pray, because from here on out, all you have and all you can give is intimacy with the living God through Jesus Christ His Son. Today, he makes you his priest, a man of sacrifice. May the Lord accept the sacrifice you bring this day, and give you the full measure of his grace.