

The Ordination of Fathers John Sollee and Martin Ibeh
Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
May 12, 2018

Dear Martin and John,

Greetings to all the priests and deacons who welcome you today into the sacrament of the priesthood.

Welcome to your brother seminarians and discerners who rejoice in the completion of your journey toward the priesthood

Welcome to your parents, and siblings, and entire family who rejoice greatly in your call. Special greetings to Juliana Ibeh and Dorothy Sollee the day before Mother's Day (you would not be here if they were not there!)

Welcome to each person in this magnificent Cathedral of St Augustine for being here in solidarity with Martin Ibeh and John Sollee as they receive the sacrament of Holy Orders – becoming priests on our behalf.

Later on, we will praise the Holy Spirit with the hymn *Veni Creator Spirit*. We will pray from the depth of our hearts: “Thy light to every sense impart. And shed thy love in every heart; thine own unfailing might supply to strengthen our infirmity...thine abiding peace bestow...be our preventing Guide!

1. The Holy Spirit is the true protagonist of the mission.

In this moving farewell of St Paul on his way to his martyrdom, St. Paul addresses the elders or presbyters of Ephesus. He invites them to be vigilant in the fidelity to mission received from Jesus: v. 28, he tells them: “keep watch over yourselves, and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given you to guard, shepherd the church of God, which he has acquired at the price of his own blood.”

So it was then, so it is now for the priest is mentored by the Spirit for the mission which is to announce, to teach, to witness the good news of salvation for all people.

Indeed it is the Holy Spirit that leads the ministers to execute the mission; it is the Holy Spirit that gives the inner power to do it, it is the Holy Spirit that makes the people ministered to consent to make effective the living Word of God received.

As the Catechism teaches, “through this sacrament by the anointing of the of the Holy Spirit priests are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ, the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head” (Cf.1563). At the consecratory prayer, I will be asking for both of you an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. I will be honored to anoint your hands with holy chrism, a sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit who makes your ministry fruitful.

From today on, Fathers Martin and John enabled by order of the priesthood will exercise the office of teaching in the name of Christ. How well the rite states it: believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach.

The gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, accompany you to live in the word of God as Mother Mary kept that word deep in her Immaculate Heart, pondering and praising...challenged by its force growing in maturity within your own hearts.

2. The Holy Spirit will enable you to do the ministry of sanctifying uniting the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ especially by the mastery of the Eucharist which you will preside. How wise the words of the ritual: "Understand what you do and imitate what you celebrate." By becoming a man of the Eucharist, you are always in a state of permanent conversion, putting to death any manifestation of sin walking in the newness of the New Man. Becoming a servant of mercy, forgiving the sins of others in the name of the Good Shepherd. As you comfort the sick with holy oil and pray daily all the hours of the day, you carry out the ministry of the sanctification of Christ, the priest in joyful self-giving. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can deepen this self-giving turning your life like Mother Mary; a life lived as a Magnificat for God, a life of joy radiating true love.
3. The Holy Spirit forms you to love in the manner of the Good Shepherd.

Today you become priests at the service of the Body of Christ...God's flock. It is a body of rich diversity in need of being called to be one for our faith is the same, and it is the same Spirit who gives gifts and charisms for the common good of the one body. The ministry of shepherding is essentially affirming the gifts the Spirit has given to each one, encouraging, like St. Paul, each to manifest these gifts for the good of the entire community.

The best compliment a priest can receive is that he smells like sheep. There is a priest in the Diocese of St. Augustine who can frequently be seen visiting patients in the hospital (often hours after midnight), at cemeteries for funerals, at homes visiting the sick, at anniversary celebrations, which he never misses diocesan events. He joins the members of St. Vincent de Paul in caring for the less fortunate, and he recalls by their first names, couples he has married 20, 30 years ago. This priest embodies what pastoral care is all about; his heart is not lonely because caring for the beautiful body of Christ fills his heart with deep satisfaction.

In Mary, the Holy Spirit fulfills the plan of the Father's loving goodness. With and through the Holy Spirit, the Virgin conceives and gives birth to the Son of God. By the Holy Spirit's power and her faith, her virginity became extremely fruitful. In Mary, the Holy Spirit manifests the Son of the Father, now the Son of the Virgin. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she makes the Word visible in the humility of his body. At the end of this mission of the Spirit, Mary became the Woman, the new Eve, mother of the living, mother of St Augustine who loved to say, of the whole Christ. (CCC 722-726).

The Diocese of St. Augustine has been enriched by the presence of Our Lady under the avocation "of la Leche" for more than 400 years. It is a maternal presence. It reflects the humility of the divine Son of God who became a vulnerable child in need of feeding by Mary of Nazareth

who gave him his whole true physical being. As we gaze at this image we cannot but praise the Father of mercies for revealing his tender love known as the mystery of the incarnation.
Hail Mary, Mother of God...