

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Priestly Ordinations
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
Saturday, May 4, 2019

Rejoice in the Lord today! Today we rejoice for the completion of a process of four wonderful young men who recognized the mystery of a call, discerned that call with care, openness, and humility, and followed the inner voice of the Spirit to undergo their rigorous seminary training. Here they are, ready and willing to receive Holy Orders.

Today in this first parish of the ancient city of our country, with a history that goes go back to that first Mass at Mission Nombre de Dios, these four candidates will be ordained as diocesan priests for the Mother Diocese of St. Augustine. Alleluia!

Something about this ordination is truly unique because the vocation of these four men flourished in our parishes, in our ministries, in the life of this local church. They are indeed hope for our future. We hope that many more vocations to the priesthood will emerge from our campus ministries, from our homes, from our Catholic schools, from lay ministry formation, from movements such as Cursillo; indeed, from the vitality of our parishes. These four deacons are indeed our own. Congratulations to so many of you present in this assembly who have played, along with their families, a significant role in the story of their amazing vocation.

We have just listened to the Word of God; I would like to reflect with you on three points which we, the entire assembly, share with the four ordinandi. We are missionary disciples nourished by the Word of God, strengthened by the Eucharist, and each one of us seeks to be faithful to a vocation of service and love:

1. Service to the Word of God: A priest chooses to surrender to the Word of God to be a pure instrument in the proclamation of the Gospel in continuity with the Apostles, and thus they are collaborators with the bishop in what the Acts of the Apostles in today's reading stated ". . . preach to the people and to testify Jesus Christ is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. That everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

A constant reference in a priestly life is Our Lady since we try to keep the Word in our heart and the Word is the source of our daily meditations and prayer life. St. Jerome reminded us that "Christ is sown in the Scriptures." This personal, prayerful experience is shared in catechesis, preaching, and even social media for a priest keeps that Word within and seeks to translate its power to the current culture, to the needs of the community.

At times the Word can only be best expressed by a quality presence towards others. At other times the proclamation will make the priest unpopular and even harshly criticized. But as Mother Teresa exhorted, "Do it anyway." As St. Paul said, this proclamation of the Gospel is at times favorable, at other times unfavorable, but the Gospel must be proclaimed at all times.

2. A priest is born as a gift from the Last Supper, given the mandate of the Lord, "Do This in Memory of Me": A priest is a servant of the Eucharist, which is Word, and sacrament.

He celebrates the Mass for a community that is rich in diversity so that it may become one faith, one family. As St. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians, “Building up the Body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to maturity to the full stature of Christ, promoting the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4: 11-16).

The mystery of the priesthood can only be properly lived within the mystery of the Eucharist. He is to enable the gift of the Eucharist for the community gathering as the Body of Christ.

Bishop Fulton Sheen gave a retreat to the Diocese of St. Augustine in October 1971 and, almost 50 years later, priests still remember teaching he repeated over and over. “Do a daily hour of Adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament.” Adoration is also extended into the Liturgy of the Hours which prolongs the Mass. So, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament enables the priest to renew the awe and amazement at the gift of the Eucharistic Lord.

3. A priest is a faithful witness to the vocation that is deep within himself, given and sealed by the Holy Spirit: Each of us is responsible for discerning our call and at times to discover a call within a call. The only way we can become the best version of ourselves is being attuned to the vocation God wills for each of us, as God calls us by our own baptismal name. Jesus only asks each one of us to abide in his love so that our joy may be complete (John 15: 10-11).

The Lord calls us friends. Fidelity is only possible when a vocation is lived in friendship with Christ, in joyful discipleship. Faithful priests are especially required today to witness an effective maturity which in turn enables the priest to witness integrity of life...an effective maturity in his chaste celibacy. The community of faith is blessed by the ministry of priests when they are good husbands and good fathers in their care of others for the entire parish. What is next in this ordination ritual? The singing of the *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, which is sung in every ordination, church council, conclave, or synod, is quite important: Come Holy Spirit, visit us at this Cathedral Basilica. Fill us with your gifts; you are our defender, the Paraclete; you are the gift from on high, the source of life, love, fire, holy anointing. Come, come, come! Visit us, fill us completely – *Veni, Creator Spiritus*.

May the protection of our Lady of La Leche assist us all with her pure maternal gaze and may her love embrace you today and all the days of your lives. Amen