

**ORDINATION OF A PRIEST
BRIAN ALFORD**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Saturday, May 28, 2011**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: because this our son, who is your relative and friend, is now to be advanced to the Order of Priests, consider carefully the nature of the rank in the Church to which he is about to be raised.

The ordination of a priest is a very important moment in the life of the whole Catholic community, but especially in the life of the man to be ordained and in the life of the diocesan bishop and his presbyterate as well.

The ordination of a priest is a very important moment in the life of the whole Catholic community because it is a sign of faith, hope and love. Faith, because the ordination of a priest indicates that the faith is still very much alive and well even now in the third millennium of Christianity. Hope, because the ordination of a priest gives reassurance that the Word of God will continue to be preached and the mission of Jesus Christ will continue to be carried out in the world. Love, because the ordination of a priest assures the community that there will be continue to be shepherds who will love the flock and care for them.

The ordination of a priest is a very important moment in the life of the man to be ordained because by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he is signed with a special character and is so configured to Christ the High Priest that he will have the power to act in the person of Christ the Head.¹ Brian Alford has come to this graced moment in response to God's call as mediated by the Church after much prayer and preparation.

The ordination of a priest is a very important moment in the life of the diocesan bishop and his presbyterate because priests take part in the Bishop's priesthood and mission. As virtuous co-workers with the episcopal Order, called to serve the people of God, they constitute one presbyterate in union with their Bishop, while being charged with different duties.² We are not lone rangers doing our own thing. We are collaborators in a great spiritual symphony. Without the musicians in an orchestra, the conductor can make no sound. Without the conductor, the musicians' sounds will disintegrate into a cacophony of dissonance and disharmony. Working together in concert, the Bishop and his priests can produce the "mystic chords of memory" of which Abraham Lincoln spoke in his First Inaugural Address one hundred and fifty years ago, "stretching . . . to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land" and swelling the chorus of communion, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Today's ordination is also personally significant for me because Brian Alford is the first priest that I have ever ordained. It is fitting that Brian Alford's last name begins with an "A," because it is my ardent hope and fervent prayer that this will be just the first of many, many more priests that I will have the privilege to ordain through God's grace for service to the mission of the One who is the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (*Revelation 22: 13*).

The ordination of a priest is also a fitting moment to ask what the community of faith asks of a priest. Blessed Pope John Paul II answered that question in this way: "This is what people ask of the priest: The priest is The man of God, the one who belongs to God and makes people think about God. . . . Christians expect to find in the priest not only a man who welcomes them, who listens to them gladly and shows a real interest in them, but also and above all a man who will help them to turn to God, to rise up to him. And so the priest needs to be trained to have a deep intimacy with God."³

As specific means for a priest to be "The man of God, the one who belongs to God and makes people think about God," a priest promises to pray the Liturgy of the Hours so that the moments of his day and his ministry may be punctuated by the markers of God's active involvement in the unfolding of our lives. By the promise to live in chaste celibacy, a priest resolves, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, to take on "the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd and spouse of

the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and His Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry.”⁴ A priest also promises obedience in order to be open to hearing God’s call as prayerfully discerned by the diocesan Bishop in consultation with his advisors and the priest himself, so that the needs of the diocese will be properly served and the mission of Christ will be effectively embraced.

The ordination of a priest is not just a time to ask what the Church expects of a priest, but also what the priest can expect from the Church. In that regard, my friends, as your Bishop, I ask you to pray for priests; pray especially today for this priest, Father Brian Alford; be with him, care for him, work with him, support him, but most of all, love him, as Christ loves you, for as I say in my Episcopal motto, *Lex Cordis Caritas*, “The Law of the Heart is Love.”

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

² Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

³ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 47.

⁴ Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 50.