

**Homily for the Mass for the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for Holy Orders
Chapel of the Immaculate Conception
Mundelein Seminary**

March 21, 2012

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is indeed a privilege and a joy for me to preside as the main Celebrant at this Mass for the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for Holy Orders. It was in this very chapel many years ago that I declared my own candidacy for Holy Orders and it was here as well that I was ordained to the diaconate and to the priesthood. My earnest prayer and fervent desire is that all of our seminarians who will declare their candidacy for Holy Orders today will share many similar joys and spiritual rewards that I have been blessed to experience as a priest for almost thirty-four years.

Yesterday a primary election was held here in the State of Illinois. Scores of candidates were chosen to run for various offices in the General Election next November. They have been campaigning for months, and the path to election still has a long way to go.

Today we are here because twenty-seven young men want to declare their candidacy for office. Thanks be to God, there will be no endless series of televised debates. We hope that these candidates will not attack each other or engage in negative campaigning! They still have a long way to go before their journey is over, but our prayers are that God's grace will give them the courage, wisdom and strength they will need to persevere on the path to which they have been called.

Just like candidates for political office, these candidates for Holy Orders will have to satisfy an electorate to achieve their goal. Unlike candidates for political office, these candidates for Holy Orders will not be chosen by citizen-voters who cast ballots, but will be called by the Church through a successor of the apostles. They will not pursue a platform adopted by a political party or an agenda generated through polls, focus groups, Super PAC's or special interest groups, but will collaborate in fulfilling a sacred mission entrusted to the apostles by our Divine Savior.

So now, dear brothers, I address these words to you who have already begun your formation. Through this formation you will learn to exercise the sacerdotal functions of a triple office: to teach, to sanctify and to govern the Christian community. These are not three separate offices or

jobs, but one only: “the functions of the ordained minister, taken as a whole, constitute a single indivisible unity in virtue of their singular foundation in Christ” and “the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other.”¹

In other words, to teach, to sanctify and to govern are merely three aspects or functions of one role. That role is to present Christ the pastor, caring for his people, the Church. The ministerial priest teaches when he sanctifies and governs, sanctifies when he teaches and governs, and governs when he teaches and sanctifies; no one function can be understood in separation from the others. This is because he takes the place of Christ the shepherd for the sake of the community. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, the Sacrament of Holy Orders “configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king.”²

When any of these three functions is neglected or separated from their counterparts, the other two are diminished. A priest whose teaching is disconnected from the call to personal holiness and the task of shepherding the flock runs the risk of devolving into a pedantic academic unconcerned with the salvation of souls. A priest whose sanctifying is disconnected from the wisdom of revelation and the good order of governance may personally be a kind and holy man, but would not be fulfilling his responsibilities as a pastor who leads and guides the community of faith as a representative of Christ, the Head of the Church. A priest whose governing is disconnected from sanctifying and teaching may become an effective but heartless manager whose efficiency is not imbued with the love of Christ.

The proper approach is found in the passage that we just heard from the Gospel of Saint John, where Jesus says, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work now. . . . Amen, Amen I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also" (John 5:17, 19). Thus, as sons of the Church and faithful followers of Jesus, you are also to do the work of the Father.

You will likewise not be acting on your own or pursuing purely personal priorities. In this regard, you must view your ministry as did Jesus, when he said, "I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me" (John 5:30).

Compelled by the love of Christ and strengthened by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, you have arrived, dear brothers, at the moment when you are to express openly your desire to be bound in Holy Orders for the service of God and His Church. We receive this desire of yours with great joy.

From this day on, you must cultivate more fully your vocation using especially those means and resources offered to you as help and support by the seminary program and the entire ecclesial community.

For our part, trusting in God's grace, we pledge the assistance of our love, our prayers and our support. May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Interdicasterial Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest*, promulgated by the Holy See August 15, 1997, #2.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1581.