

**ORDINATION OF A PRIEST  
HYLAND L. SMITH  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Saturday, May 25, 2012**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: “What difference can I make? I’m only one person.” This is the excuse we often hear from people who do not vote, who do not participate in civic affairs, who do not get involved in the life of the Church, and who generally decline to do anything outside of their small circle of personal self-centered interests.

We are all here today because one person has taken a different path: Hyland Smith has said “yes” to God’s call to serve at the altar of Christ, and I can assure you that this one person, soon to be Father Hyland Smith, will make a huge difference in the life of the parishes where he will serve, in the communities in which he will live, and in his ministry throughout this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois for years to come.

It is not unusual for anyone to hesitate to step forward into a public role of leadership. As we heard in the first reading today from Sacred Scripture, the great prophet Jeremiah protested that he did not know how

to speak, for he was too young (Jer. 1:6). Jeremiah's response to God's call echoed that of Moses, who replied to the Lord speaking to him from the burning bush that he had "never been eloquent" and was "slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Even after the Lord had assured Moses that He would teach him what to say and assist him in speaking, Moses continued to refuse, saying, "If you please, my Lord, send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). But God refused to take no for an answer, telling him that Aaron, his brother, who was a good speaker, would assist him and speak for him (Exodus 4:14-16). So it happened, for it was God who did the choosing.

In contrast to the hesitancy and excuses initially offered by Jeremiah and Moses, fortunately for us Our Lady did not delay in saying "yes" to God's call conveyed to her through the Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38). The Blessed Virgin Mary did not hesitate in responding to God's will because she was immaculately conceived and thus her judgment was not clouded and impaired by the selfishness of original sin.

The significance of Mary's "yes" is described quite clearly by St. Bernardine of Siena, who said, "The Blessed Virgin, by her consent to the Son's Incarnation, with the most intent ardor sought and obtained the salvation of all. By this consent she dedicated herself to the salvation of

all.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, Mary’s “*fiat*” is the root of our salvation. As always, Mary sets an example for us and shows us that our “yes,” our willingness to speak, is connected to announcing the salvation that comes from the Lord. The call of Moses and the call of Jeremiah show us that God’s call is inseparably bound with the call to speak, whether in word or in action.

So, when someone like Hyland Smith is chosen for a sacred vocation, the examples of Moses, Jeremiah and Mary unmistakably point to the essential quality of such a vocation, which is to proclaim in word and action that salvation comes from a personal relationship with the Lord. The very last canon of the *Code of Canon Law* sums it up succinctly: “*salus animarum suprema lex,*” that is, “the salvation of souls is always the supreme law of the Church.”<sup>2</sup> A person who truly understands the implication of this priority for the salvation of souls quickly realizes that so much of what fascinates people enamored of this world is basically inconsequential. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa put it, “As no darkness can be seen by anyone surrounded by light, so no trivialities can capture the attention of anyone who has his eyes on Christ. The man who keeps his eyes upon the head and origin of the whole universe has them on virtue in all its perfection; he has them on truth, on justice, on immortality and on everything else that is

good, for Christ is goodness itself.”<sup>3</sup>

Hyland, we rejoice in your ordination because, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, you are signed with a special character and are so configured to Christ the High Priest that you will have the power to act in the person of Christ the Head.<sup>4</sup> You will have the blessed privilege as well as the sublime duty to proclaim the Good News of the Lord’s gift of salvation to the world, a world that is skeptical of this message because it calls people to a relationship with a God that they cannot see.

Convincing people to accept this faith is not easy, but we have an outstanding example of someone who was most effective in his powers of persuasion, a great saint depicted in our third stained glass window on the north wall of this Cathedral, Pope Saint Leo the Great, shown peacefully and successfully persuading Attila the Hun not to invade Italy in the year 452. In his sermon for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Lord, which we celebrated recently, Pope Saint Leo the Great noted that the grace of God shows itself “still more marvelous when, in spite of the withdrawal from men’s sight of everything that is rightly felt to command their reverence, faith does not fail, hope is not shaken, charity does not grow cold. For such is the power of great minds, such is the light of truly believing souls, that they put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye; they fix their desires

on what is beyond sight. Such fidelity could never be born in our hearts, nor could anyone be justified by faith, if our salvation lay only in what was visible.”<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, because of our need and desire to experience the divine with our senses, Pope Saint Leo the Great observed that “the Redeemer’s visible presence has passed into the sacraments. Our faith is nobler and stronger because sight has been replaced by a doctrine whose authority has been accepted by believing hearts, enlightened from on high. . . . Throughout the world women no less than men, tender girls as well as boys, have given their life’s blood in the struggle for the faith. It is the faith that has driven out devils, healed the sick and raised the dead.”<sup>6</sup>

Hyland, this is the faith that you are called to proclaim, these are the sacraments that you are called to administer to the faithful, this is the salvation that you are called to announce as Good News to all the world. Thank you for saying yes to this divine vocation. We prayerfully beg the Lord to strengthen you with the grace of this sacrament of Holy Orders to carry out these sacred tasks with energy, excitement and enthusiasm.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in St. Alphonsus of Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 2000), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Canon 1752, *Code of Canon Law*, Latin-English Edition (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> From a Homily by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop, in the Office of Readings for Monday of the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time, *Liturgy of the Hours*.

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

<sup>5</sup> From a Sermon by Saint Leo the Great, Pope, in the Office of Readings for Friday of the Sixth Week of Easter, *Liturgy of the Hours*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.