

**Homily for the Ordination of Steven Arisman and Seth Brown
to the Sacred Order of Priests
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Saturday, May 24, 2014**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

Last weekend my brother Allen and his son Ian were in town for a travel league baseball tournament in Chatham. I spent most of the day last Saturday watching Ian and his teammates play three games, the first at one o'clock, the second at five and the third at seven o'clock in the evening. It was a lot of baseball, and although I like baseball, the main reason I stayed for all three games was to spend some time with my brother and my nephew, whom I don't get to see that often.

My brother Allen is the youngest of my six brothers. Two of my brothers and I are White Sox fans. Three other brothers have always been Cub fans. So when he was younger, Allen broke the fraternal tie in favor of the White Sox. But somewhere along the line he had a falling out with the White Sox, and now he roots for the Cubs. How anyone can see changing his loyalty from the White Sox to the Cubs as an improvement remains a mystery to me!

But I began to get some understanding for this phenomenon spending time with my brother watching ten-year-olds play baseball last Saturday! One does not watch little league baseball to see exceptional athletic prowess, golden-glove fielding dexterity, hall of fame pitching talent and skillful hitting proficiency. The only possible explanation for such undying devotion is love! After all, the Bible says that “love covers a multitude of wrongs” (see Proverbs 10:12, James 5:20, and 1 Peter 4:8). The reason my brother, like so many other parents, is willing to spend his weekends watching his son and his teammates play error-prone little league baseball is because he is a loving father.

The example of a loving father who spends time with his children, caring for them, feeding them, teaching them, trying to help them, rejoicing with them when they succeed and consoling them when they fail, is the model not only for a parent of biological children, but also for a priest caring for his spiritual children.

After their ordination to the sacred order of priests in just a few minutes, Steven Arisman and Seth Brown from this point on will be called “Father.” This title should be understood not just as an honorary designation, but as a real description of the fatherly role in which people

will now see them, and the heart of this spiritual fatherhood is the love of our Father in heaven.

In the Gospel passage that we have just heard, Jesus said to his disciples: “As the Father loves me, so I also love you” (Jn 15:9). When Christ shows us how to love one another, He is manifesting the paternal love of God the Father. The priest’s main duty, as one called “Father,” is to proclaim this love with joy and make it known wherever and whenever possible. This is what we call the “Good News”!

In his papal allocution opening the Second Vatican Council over fifty years ago, Pope Saint John XXIII noted that, in order to understand the Gospel in our changing world, it is “necessary that doctrine itself be examined more broadly and more deeply and that people drink of it more fully, something desired by all who sincerely proclaim Christian, Catholic and Apostolic Truth.”¹ The various documents of the Second Vatican Council themselves, especially *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes*, address how the Church is “to carry out its principal mission and its priority mission of proclaiming the Gospel in a way which is renewed and effective.”²

Ten years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI

echoed and confirmed the words of Saint John XXIII and the Council, saying that the objective of the Council was to make the Church “more suitable for proclaiming the Gospel to human beings” of our time and that, in order to do so, “it is absolutely necessary to place ourselves before a patrimony of faith which the Church has the duty to preserve in its intangible purity, but also to present it to people of our time, as far as possible, in a way which is comprehensible and persuasive.”³ Our zeal for proclaiming the Good News of the Father’s love must “stem from true sanctity of life” and be “fed by prayer and especially by the love of the Eucharist,” so that it “may in turn cause the one who preaches to grow in holiness.”⁴

Pope Saint John Paul II pointed to the cross as the symbol of this love. Speaking in his native Poland on his first return to his homeland in 1979, Saint John Paul II said, “Wherever the cross is raised up, there arises the sign that the Good News of the salvation of man through Love has already reached that place. . . . With that cross [referring to a cross raised at a new church near Cracow], we received a sign, that is to say that on the threshold of the new millennium, in these new times, in these new conditions of life, the Gospel is proclaimed once more.”⁵

Proclaiming the Father's love involves the cross because of the difficult challenges and staunch resistance to this message, even in places that have been traditionally Catholic in identity. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of this when he said, "In our own time one of the particular features (of the Church's mission) has been to face up to the phenomenon of people distancing themselves from the faith, which has manifested itself progressively in societies and in cultures which for centuries appeared to have been imbued by the Gospel." In this context, "what all the Churches living in these areas which have been traditionally Christian need is a renewed missionary drive, the expression of a new and generous openness to the gift of grace."⁶

Despite these difficulties and challenges, Pope Francis reminds us that the "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness."⁷ All are invited to a "personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them. . . . No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.'"⁸

Steven and Seth, soon to be Father Steven Arisman and Father Seth Brown, this is the loving fatherhood that you are called to embrace with joy, this is the faith that you are called to proclaim, 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.

¹ Pope Saint John XXIII, Papal Allocution *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, October 11, 1962, n. 6.5.

² Archbishop Rino Fisichella, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (Victoria, Australia: Freedom Publishing, 2012), p. 9.

³ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, nn. 2-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 76.

⁵ Pope Saint John Paul II, Visit to the Mogila sanctuary at Nowa Huta on June 9, 1979, in which he recalled the homily he gave there as Archbishop of Cracow on Christmas night, 1973; quoted in Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, p. 20.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Ubicumque et semper*, September 21, 2010, preamble.

⁷ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, n. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 3; quoting Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, May 9, 1975, 22: AAS 67 (1975), 297.