

**Homily for the Ordination of Samuel Bagyo, Adam Prichard,  
Martin Smith, and Jason Stone  
to the Sacred Order of Deacons  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**Saturday of the Third Week of Easter  
May 10, 2014**

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is with great joy that I welcome all of you to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception this morning for this glorious celebration of the ordination of four men to the sacred order of deacons.

In just a few minutes, as we chant the Litany of the Saints, these men will all lie prostrate on the floor of the sanctuary, symbolizing their willingness to offer to the Lord the total gift of themselves to be of service to Christ and to His Church in the ordained ministry for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

It would be a mistake to view the ordination to the diaconate of men preparing for the priesthood as being somehow less important than what will happen a year from now at their priesthood ordination. Sometimes people speak of ordination to the priesthood as the “real” ordination, the one that *really* counts. As a result, the ordination to the diaconate might be

seen just as another step to the final goal of priesthood. While it is true that this may not be the final destination of their journey of formation, it is nevertheless an extremely important day in their lives personally and in the life of the Church.

With their ordination to the order of the diaconate, these four men's lives will be changed forever. They will officially become members of the clerical state, set apart by God to share in the ministry of Christ in a more profound way. They leave behind their former life as members of the laity as they are consecrated for the Church's ministry. As a sign of their willingness to be totally dedicated to this ministry, they will make a commitment to a life of celibacy which allows them to cling to Christ more easily with an undivided heart, freeing themselves more completely for the service of God and man.

On this day, these men will also make that firm commitment to faithfully pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the official prayer of the Church in which they pray daily for the People of God and indeed the whole world. This obligation will ensure that they remain rooted in the fact that they have been chosen by God to be of service to His people, interceding on their behalf by uniting their prayer to Christ's prayer to His Father.

In addition, they will also promise obedience to me as their Bishop and to my successors. This promise of obedience should not be understood simply in the way that a soldier follows the orders of a commanding officer or how an employee complies with an assignment from the boss. The promise of obedience made by a cleric in the Sacrament of Holy Orders is succinctly expressed in the Latin phrase, *sentire cum Ecclesia*, which is not only to think with the Church, but also to manifest in one's actions the inner dispositions of a heart, mind and soul closely conformed in humility to the will of Christ. The disobedience of Adam and Eve manifested their interior disposition to disregard the will of their Creator. The obedience of Christ to the will of His Father manifested His total commitment that He and His Father would always be so closely identified with each other that anyone who believes in Jesus would believe not only in Him but in the one who sent Him, and whoever sees Jesus would see the one who sent Him (cf. John 12:44-45). Saint John Paul II taught that Jesus' obedience to the Father's will was marked by a deep sense of responsibility and mutual trust.<sup>1</sup> Faithful adherence to the promise of obedience in carrying out our ministerial responsibilities while trusting in God's grace assures that our ministry will always be in accord with the will of God.

Last year the Holy Father commemorated the golden anniversary of the death of Pope John XXIII, recently canonized as Saint John XXIII, with a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, during which he called on the faithful to imitate Pope John by growing in obedience to God and self-mastery to achieve peace. Pope Francis said, "If peace was the outward hallmark [of Pope John], obedience constituted his inner disposition.

The episcopal motto chosen by Pope John XXIII was *Oboedientia et Pax*, "Obedience and Peace." Pope Francis commented on this motto, saying, "Obedience, in fact, was the instrument with which to achieve peace." He explained how Saint John XXIII accomplished it through "long and challenging work on himself" as he pursued a path of "gradual purification of the heart." Pope Francis stressed that John XXIII's obedience led him to live "a more profound faithfulness, which could be called, as he would say, abandonment to divine Providence."<sup>2</sup>

Understood in this way, the promises of obedience, celibacy, and daily praying the Liturgy of the Hours are rightly seen not as disconnected realities, but as closely related to each other in such a way that they foster and spiritually nourish each other.

Reflecting on the changes that these candidates for ordination are about to undergo and the lifelong promises that they are about to make, we can see how this day is indeed a moment of great importance and not just another step on the way to priesthood.

My dear sons, on your part, you are also invited to see the profound significance of this day as you prepare to begin your life as an ordained minister of the Church. Resist the temptation to see this merely as a time of transition to something greater. Even though you know that there is another step to take, do not miss the opportunity to let your foot be firmly placed on this important step now. Your fidelity in the coming year to the ministry of the diaconate which I am about to bestow upon you by the laying on of hands is the best way to prepare for the priesthood to which God is calling you.

Immediately following the homily, I will ask you several questions by which you will freely express your commitment to fulfill this ministry according to the mind of the Church. Your affirmative responses to these questions reflect your willingness to accept this responsibility. Your answers are far more than just an acceptance of the functions that you will undertake as deacons. Rather, your "I do" to these questions signifies a

deeper awareness of the new identity that you are about to assume as being totally dedicated to the service of Christ and His Church.

The Gospel passage for today's Mass is therefore a fitting one for this celebration. After seeing several followers depart as a result of His hard saying about the Eucharist, Jesus asked the Twelve: "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter responded by saying: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:66-69). They were convinced that their lives were to be spent with Him and for Him, even if that meant that the path would be difficult at times. Your promises reflect the same attitude that you are convinced that serving Him and His people with your entire being is the only path worth following from this day forward.

After the laying on of hands and the Prayer of Ordination, you will be vested in the sacred stole and dalmatic. The stole symbolizes the yoke of Jesus Christ, the burden of authority that is gentle to bear because it is an authority of service (cf. Matthew 11:28; 20:28). The dalmatic takes the form of a cross and is worn during the Sacrifice of the Mass as a reminder of Christ's Passion, as well as his generous and loving action of self-giving.

These sacred vestments that will soon be entrusted to you are a constant reminder of the promise you will presently make “to conform your way of life always to the example of Christ, of whose Body and Blood you are ministers at the altar” (*Ordination of Deacons*, 200).

When I give to you the Book of the Gospels, I will entrust you with the task of being heralds of Christ (cf. *Ordination of Deacons*, 210). Never allow yourselves to be turned away from the Gospel in the way that you live your lives. Nor should you ever shy away from preaching the truths of the Gospel and of our faith, difficult as it may be at times. May your preaching always be motivated by an authentic charity which desires the spiritual well-being of those to whom you proclaim the Good News.

The Lord is about to insert you more deeply into the mystery of His work of salvation. As a result, you are invited to deepen your commitment to prayer and the sacraments through which your life is more united with Him in whose name you will minister. With this greater responsibility also come the graces that will assist you in fulfilling all to which you will be called to do. With confidence in that assistance, may you joyfully embrace this gift and generously share it with the Church for God’s greater glory and the salvation of souls. May God give you this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint John Paul II, John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 21.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/john-xxiii-stressed-obedience-as-the-path-to-peace-pope-francis-says>