

**Homily for the Ordination of
Samuel Bagyo, Adam Prichard, Martin Smith and Jason Stone
to the Sacred Order of Priests
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Saturday, May 23, 2015**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

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

After their ordination to the sacred order of priests in just a few minutes, Samuel Bagyo, Adam Prichard, Martin Smith and Jason Stone will no longer be called “Deacon.” As part of the ceremony today you will remove your deacon’s stole and be vested with the stole and chasuble of a priest. This does not mean that you should cast off entirely from your consciousness or your ministerial identity the diaconal character that permanently marked your soul last year upon your ordination to the diaconate. Indeed, under my chasuble I am wearing a deacon’s dalmatic, not only as a sign of the fullness of the priesthood that a bishop has received in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, but also as a reminder that all of us who are ordained, whether as deacon, priest or bishop, always retain the identity and responsibility of diaconal service to the People of God.

After this morning's liturgy, our newly ordained priests will formally be addressed as "Reverend." To understand better the meaning of this form of address, it is helpful to look at the etymology of the word "reverend." As with many ecclesiastical words in the Latin Church, the word "reverend" comes from the Latin form of the gerundive or future passive participle of necessity. Examples that we frequently use in the church are *confirmandi* ("those needing to be confirmed") and *ordinandi* ("those needing to be ordained"). Thus, *reverendi*, from the Latin word *revereor*, means "those needing to be revered," "respected" or "feared."

Now we might ask why any human being in our egalitarian twenty-first century American culture needs to be revered, respected or feared. That is a good question, the answer to which is that, of course, there is no inherent reason why anyone should revere, respect or fear Samuel Bagyo, Adam Prichard, Martin Smith or Jason Stone in and of themselves. That is important for all of us to remember who bear the title, "Reverend," "Very Reverend" or "Most Reverend," lest we become puffed up in the conceit that these titles have something to do with our own personal qualities. When people show reverence or respect for a priest, they do so because they are believers who recognize that a priest is an *Alter Christus*, "Another

Christ,” who acts *in persona Christi Capitis Ecclesiae*, that is, an ordained priest is one who acts in the person of Christ the Head of the Church. Moreover, there is no reason why anyone should fear a priest as a person, but we all should fear God the just Judge that a priest represents. Even in this fear of God, we are reminded in the First Letter of Saint John the Apostle, “Our love is brought to perfection in this, that we should have confidence on the day of judgment; for our relation to this world is just like his love. Love has no room for fear; rather, perfect love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:17-18). Pope Francis recently noted that human fear is a vice that should not be confused with what is referred to as “fear of the Lord,” which is a virtue that helps Christians in their mission.¹

Still, this formal title of address can seem off-putting in our contemporary context, thus in more colloquial parlance of everyday speech a priest is more commonly and endearingly called “Father.” Even the Roman Pontiff is addressed by the familiar title of “Holy Father” or “Pope,” which in Italian and Spanish is rendered affectionately as *Papa*.

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"!

So how does a father show his love for his children? First and foremost, a loving father should be married to the mother of their children. The tradition of celibacy in the Latin Church that stems from apostolic times is based on the premise that, as an *Alter Christus*, a priest's spouse is the Bride of Christ, that is, the Church.

Next, a loving father wraps his children in clothing to protect them from the elements. In baptism, as St. Paul wrote, the children of God put on Christ (cf. Romans 13:14) and are clothed in Christ's way of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (cf. Colossians 3:12).

A loving father provides a home and shelter for his children. A priest gathers the People of God into the Church, to provide a home where they are surrounded by the warmth of God's love and are protected from the snares and imprecations of the Evil One.

A loving father makes sure that his children are fed. A priest feeds his children with the eucharistic meal of Christ's Body and Blood, filling their souls with the gift of finest wheat and the cup of salvation.

A loving father cares for his children when they are sick. A priest prays for healing for God's children when he anoints them in the Sacrament of the Sick.

A loving father teaches his children the difference between right and wrong, but is patient with their shortcomings. A priest teaches the faithful to choose good and avoid evil, but with the generous grace of God's abundant mercy absolves the sins of those who seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance.

Samuel, Adam, Marty and Jason, soon to be Father Samuel Bagyo, Father Adam Prichard, Father Martin Smith and Father Jason Stone, 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. In return for your fatherly love, may the people you serve love, revere and respect you. May they be grateful children who appreciate the gift of your fatherly priesthood. 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 Francis, "Fearful and joyless communities are not Christian," Daily Mass Homily, May 15, 2015, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-fearful-and-joyless-communities-are-not-chris>.