

**Homily for the Ordination of
Paul Joseph Bonk and Joseph Braden Maher to the Sacred Order of Priests
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Saturday, May 28, 2016**

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

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

One of the most pleasant duties and indeed one of the happiest occasions in the ministry of every bishop is the ordination of new priests. It certainly is a great blessing for me and for our diocese to celebrate today the priestly ordination of Deacons Paul Joseph Bonk and Joseph Braden Maher to the Sacred Order of Priests of the Catholic Church in service of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. The clergy, religious and lay Christian faithful of our diocese join me in praying that the graces imparted in this Sacrament of Holy Orders will bear abundant fruit in the ministry of soon-to-be Fathers Paul Bonk and Braden Maher throughout their lives.

Naturally, the ordination of priests takes place in the context of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. While the Eucharistic ritual is familiar to most of us here, the Rite of Ordination is a liturgical ceremony that perhaps many here in attendance today have not experienced before, so I would like to offer some explanation of the rituals and symbols that we will be using in this ordination liturgy. Symbols are intended to convey meaning, so it is essential that we understand the meaning behind the symbols if we are truly to appreciate their significance and participate fully in their celebration.

The rite of ordination for priests takes place within Mass following the bishop's homily after the scriptural readings proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word. Standing before the bishop, those to be ordained together make five resolutions.

First, they resolve with the help of the Holy Spirit to discharge the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock.

Then they resolve to exercise the ministry of the Word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith.

Third, they resolve to celebrate faithfully and reverently the mysteries of Christ handed down by the Church, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people.

Fourth, they resolve to implore God's mercy upon the people entrusted to their care by observing the command to pray without ceasing. This is done principally by praying the Liturgy of the Hours daily at the appointed times throughout the day.

Fifth, they resolve to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice and to consecrate themselves to God for the salvation of all. This identification of the priest with the pure sacrifice of Christ the High Priest and being consecrated to God for the salvation of all is lived out in the commitment to chaste celibacy.

After the candidates for ordination declare their intention and their resolve to undertake the priestly office, each one to be ordained goes before the bishop and makes a promise of obedience. As he does so, he kneels before the bishop and places his hands between those of the bishop. The

bishop asks him: "Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?" One of the commentaries on this promise says, "The man to be ordained must answer yes to this question if he is to be ordained." That might seem obvious enough, but it probably needs to be said! Then again, I have never had a candidate get this far and then say no!

A lot of time is spent in the seminary reflecting on these promises, which we who are ordained take very seriously because they are integrally related to our ministries and apostolic works.

The purpose of obedience, for example, is not a matter of arbitrarily imposing authority or seeking to exercise control for its own sake, but flows rather out of a sense of mission. The word "mission" comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means to send or dispatch someone. Just as Jesus sent his apostles and disciples on the mission to preach the Good News of God's Kingdom to all the nations, to baptize them and make them His disciples, clergy are sent by their bishop, who is a successor of the apostles, to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus was obedient to the Father for the sake of our salvation, we are called to be obedient to God's will. Obedience is related to the mission of the Church in that none of us is

a solo practitioner or lone ranger doing his own thing. Obedience in service of the mission helps to assure that the various ministries in a diocese are not done in a haphazard way out of personal whim, but are coordinated in an organized manner for the mission of the Church to be carried out in a coherent fashion.

The purpose of celibacy and chastity is not to encourage priests to be workaholics simply because they have more time to work since they do not have family responsibilities. Celibacy and chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven first of all point to the reality of the eternal life to which we are all called beyond life in this world. Celibacy and chastity also make the priest more available to minister to the needs of his parish family without the responsibilities of a biological family which are the priority of those called to the vocation of marriage and family life in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The pledge to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily is in keeping with one of the most basic expectations of the Church, as the faithful regularly ask their priests to pray for various intentions.

When these promises have been publicly proclaimed, the candidates then lie prostrate on the floor and the Litany of the Saints is sung, symbolizing the candidates' unworthiness for the office to be assumed and their dependence upon God and the prayers of the Christian community. This litany of supplication prays for the intercession of the saints in order that God may look favorably upon those to be ordained.

A prayer then follows asking that the Holy Spirit may be poured upon them. While these prayers are being prayed, the faithful are to join their prayers for the candidates to those of the bishop.

The essential matter of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is the laying on of hands and the essential form of the Sacrament is the prayer of ordination. Only a bishop can ordain a priest because he shares in the ministry of Jesus passed down through the apostles. At the ordination of a priest, the ordaining bishop lays hands on each man to be ordained a priest. This is done in silence. All of the priests who are present then lay hands on each candidate as well. This communal laying on of hands is to symbolize the fact that they are to be ordained into the presbyteral college of the local Church. This is in keeping with an ancient text found in the

Apostolic Tradition which is believed to have been written by Hippolytus in 280 A.D. He states that this common laying on of hands takes place at a priest's ordination, because "they all have a common and similar spirit." By this ritual the ordaining bishop and the other priests invoke the Holy Spirit to come down upon the one to be ordained, giving him a sacred character and setting him apart for the designated ministry.

The bishop alone then says the prayer of ordination. It alludes to Aaron and the seventy elders called by Moses as Old Testament figures that prefigure the priests who will work as coworkers of the bishop. The prayer is directed to the Father, who by the power of the Holy Spirit provides for the various forms of ministry within the Church of Christ. After speaking of the various forms of ministry exercised within the Church, it states that the priests are those who assist the apostles in making Christ present in the Church today. It asks for the spirit of holiness for the new priests so that they may help to sanctify God's people. It also asks that they may be configured to Christ the priest and spotless victim. While this prayer is being prayed, the faithful are to join their prayers silently to those

of the bishop. Once this prayer is concluded, the men being ordained are priests. The rites which follow are explanatory rites.

The first explanatory rite consists in the bestowal of the stole and chasuble upon the newly ordained. Each of the deacons to be ordained priests entered the Cathedral wearing a stole diagonally across his chest tied at the side as for a deacon. It is now adjusted to be worn as proper for a priest, over the shoulders hanging down on both sides of his chest. The stole symbolizes the authority and responsibility to serve in imitation of Christ. It reflects the line from Scripture: *"For my yoke is easy and my burden light"* (Matthew 11:30). Another priest assists in this and then helps the new priest to put on the outer garment called a chasuble. This is the proper vestment for a priest and bishop to wear for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is given to a priest because only he and a bishop may validly celebrate the Mass. He is to wear this whenever he presides at Mass.

The bishop then anoints the palms of the hands of each of the new priests. As he does so, he says: "The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, guard and preserve you, that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God." Anointing

with oil stems from the Old Testament and indicates that someone or something is being set apart for a sacred task or duty. The anointing of the hands signifies that the hands of the newly ordained priest are being prepared for performing his priestly duties and handling the sacred vessels which will be part of the priestly ministry, for example, consecrating the bread and the wine, anointing the sick and blessing people. It also symbolizes the priest's distinctive participation in Christ's priesthood by the sacrifice he will offer with his hands.

A paten holding the bread and a chalice containing wine mixed with water for the celebration of Mass are then presented to the newly ordained priests. These are the symbols of the priest's duty to offer the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist at Mass and to follow the example of Christ crucified. The bishop presents them to each newly ordained priest saying: "Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate, and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross." This gesture ties the rite of ordination directly to the Eucharistic context and to the priest's service on behalf of the people of God.

The bishop and representatives of the presbyterate give the sign of peace to the newly ordained priests. This signifies their admittance to the rank of co-workers with the bishop and the other members of the local clergy who assist the bishop in his diocese. This does not replace the rite of peace later during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The sign of peace will be exchanged among all the members of the assembly at the usual time just before receiving Holy Communion.

The Mass then continues as usual, with the newly ordained serving as concelebrants with the bishop and the other priests present.

When I administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is customary for me to sing a song as part of my homily. During the past year, I have been singing a song called "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)" by Hillsong United.¹ I have become increasingly fond of this song the more I have sung it. As I reflect on the lyrics, it occurs to me that this song is also very appropriate for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, as the lyrics express very well how the Holy Spirit will lead us and strengthen our faith as the Lord calls us to follow Him without fear upon the waters of the great unknown.

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown, where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep, my faith will stand

...

And I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

...

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand, will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now

...

So I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine

...

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders

Let me walk upon the waters

Wherever You would call me

Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander

And my faith will be made stronger

In the presence of my Savior

...

I will call upon Your name

Keep my eyes above the waves

My soul will rest in Your embrace

I am Yours and You are mine

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Song from the album *Zion*. Writers: Matt Crocker, Joel Houston & Salomon Ligthelm; released September 10, 2013