

**Homily for the Ordination of Michael Friedel, Ronnie Lorilla,  
Rafał Pырchła, and Wayne Stock  
to the Sacred Order of Deacons  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**Friday in the Octave of Easter  
April 1, 2016**

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: when it was announced that this ordination liturgy was scheduled to take place on April 1, several people responded by asking if it was a joke. April 1, as you know, is affectionately known as April Fool's Day in our country. It has become the practice to perform various pranks or hoaxes on this day, so when something is brought up in reference to April 1, there is always a bit of skepticism as to its truth. Rest assured, gentlemen, there is no hoax here!

Seemingly unrelated, April 1 has also become a significant day in our country for another reason. In many states, April 1 marks the official beginning of the fishing season. Many avid fishermen rise early in the morning and drive to their favorite stream, often braving bad weather and, in many cases, frigid water. There is no guarantee that they will catch anything, except maybe a cold. For those who are not diehard fishermen

and who witness this annual tradition, the name for this day seems truly fitting, for those who are going out to face the elements for hours, knowing full well that they might be unsuccessful, appear to be fools for doing what they are doing.

As a result of this, fishermen sometimes get a bad name for their dedication to what seems to be a waste of time. Of course, this is true for any hobby or pastime when seen by those who are looking in from the outside. But it is worth our focusing on fishermen, because it was from among that group that Jesus chose some of His first apostles.

On the surface, it may seem like Jesus' choice of these men to be His first disciples was a foolish one. Common sense might suggest that He could have chosen men who were more qualified for the task. Yet, He still chose fishermen, and we know that Jesus does not make mistakes, so He had a good reason for selecting them. Since you, my dear sons, are preparing to enter into the ordained ministry in the Church, it is helpful for us to consider this point of the connection between fishing for fish and fishing for men.

Jesus knew what He was looking for in the men who would continue His work in the world. He knew that many of the qualities that made these

men good fishermen would also help them to be good fishers of men. Of course, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit sent upon them on the day of Pentecost that would give them the grace to do this work, but grace builds on and perfects our human nature; it does not destroy it. Therefore, the human qualities that they had as fishermen were well-suited for God's grace to perfect for this important work. So what are some of those qualities that we can learn from these fishermen that will prepare you, dear sons, to be effective ministers for the good of souls in the Church and in the world?

First of all, fishermen have a passion for what they do. That passion is reflected in their willingness to get up early and brave less than ideal conditions for long periods of time. They do it because they love it. That same passion needs to exist in your pastoral ministry. You need to continue to develop a love for what you do. In particular, it will be necessary to continually foster a deep love for souls, desiring their spiritual well-being, and giving yourselves to that work.

We have many examples of saints who were ministers of Christ who had a remarkable love for souls, even to the point of wearing themselves out in service to them. Our readings from the Acts of the Apostles during

this Easter season show the zeal for souls that the Apostles had. There are countless others we can look to in the life of the Church. Take, for example, St. Francis Xavier, who exhausted himself in the work of evangelization, baptizing more than 40,000 people. We also have the example of St. John Vianney who spent many hours each day in the confessional. We could name several more, including so many dedicated priests and deacons sitting here in the sanctuary with you. The grace of ordination is not magic in that it will automatically instill within you this passion for souls. It is something that needs continual cultivation and work, and the grace of the sacrament will assist you in this regard.

Another characteristic exhibited by fishermen is that they are creative and flexible. One look into the tackle box of a fisherman will reveal a wide variety of items. They know that certain conditions require certain techniques. They know that certain fish are more receptive to one approach than another. Fishermen adapt to the circumstances and use the means available to them. They do not stick to just one approach.

This will be essential in your work of pastoral ministry. Throughout your seminary formation, you have filled your tackle box with many tools, learning how to use them to meet the various needs that arise. You need to

know your people. You meet them where they are at in order to bring them closer to Christ. As St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, taught: “enter through their door but be sure bring them out through your door.” This will not be possible if we only apply one approach to our ministry, so we need to be flexible, using the means available to us. Their door is wherever you find people in their journey of life. Our door is the door of faith and it should be our goal to lead people through that door of faith so that they may enter into eternal life through the gate of heaven.

Knowing your people also means knowing the culture in which they live. We need to be familiar with what is going on around them, then apply the various tools of evangelization and pastoral practice to help the people see that the message of the Gospel is indeed relevant to the world in which they live and the problems that they encounter.

A third characteristic of fishermen, and possibly the one that was most prized by Jesus, is their remarkable sense of patience.<sup>1</sup> We see this patience in the Gospel for today. They had plenty of experience with disappointing results. Their lack of success was nothing new, so when Jesus asked them to cast the nets again, they did not protest in frustration, they patiently did as He asked. Jesus knew that there would be many

disappointments in the work of fishing for men, so He chose these men, knowing that their patience would serve them well.

This is an important lesson that you will need to learn in pastoral ministry. There will be times when people will love what you say in a homily or compliment you for something that you have done in the parish. But there will also be times when it seems like nobody listens to what you have said. There will be times when nobody shows up for a talk that you have worked hard to prepare. There will also be times when people will criticize you or disagree with something you have said or done. It can be very discouraging, and your patience will be tried on more occasions than you would like.

In the end, the fruitfulness of your ministry does not depend on you. It depends on Christ and the grace that He provides to those to whom you minister. This does not exempt you from working hard and being proficient in your preaching, teaching, and pastoral work. Like the Apostles, as long as you persevere and stay close to Christ, remaining obedient to His will for you in every circumstance, His grace, flowing through you, His instruments, will not be ineffective. Even if you do not see immediate results, you will have the peace of mind knowing that what

you have done has not been a waste of your time. I can guarantee that there will be ups and downs in your ministry, so pray for the grace of that remarkable patience, rooted in faith, trusting that the Lord will bless the efforts you undertake for His glory and the good of souls.

These are just three of the many qualities that will help you as you begin your life as ordained ministers, sharing in the work of being fishers of men. For the next year, as you prepare for ordination to the priesthood, you will be exercising your role as a deacon. I urge you not to overlook the importance of this time in your formation. Do not fall into the trap of viewing the diaconate ordination just as a final hurdle to clear on the path toward the ultimate goal of ordination to the priesthood. This day of your ordination to the transitional diaconate is no less important than your much-anticipated ordination to the priesthood a year from now, since diaconal service should always be an inseparable dimension of your future priestly ministry. We do not shed one Holy Order upon receiving another, but they remain integrally connected and interwoven elements of the whole character of our divinely-given Sacred Orders.

While it is true, God willing, that you will be back here next year to be ordained priests, this is where the Lord has called you to be in your

vocation right now. The graces that you are about to receive will change your life, and the more you allow yourself to exercise your ministry faithfully as a deacon now, the better prepared you will be to enter into your future ministry as a priest.

The qualities that I just mentioned can and should be developed during this coming year, particularly in those functions that are a part of the ministry of the diaconate, namely: administering baptism solemnly, being a custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, assisting at and blessing marriages in the name of the Church, bringing Viaticum to the dying, reading the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, instructing and exhorting the people, presiding over the worship and prayer of the faithful, administering sacramentals, and officiating at funeral and burial services<sup>2</sup>.

It is my prayer for the four of you that you embrace this new way of life by living that the life that is expected of you by Christ and His Church as deacons. I ask all of us who have already received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to foster the qualities exhibited by Christ's first followers, so that we too can be more effective in our ministry of being fishers of men. And I ask all of you, the lay Christian faithful, to pray for these men, and indeed for all of the Church's ordained ministers, that we might be open to

the grace of our ordination so that we can be of greater assistance to you in your earthly pilgrimage of faith as we all strive to reach our common goal of sharing in the victory of the Resurrection.

May God give you this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Monsignor Ronald Knox, *Pastoral and Occasional Sermons*, reprinted 2002, Ignatius Press.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, §29.