

Homily for the Ordination of Priests

**Michael Andrew Friedel
Ron Maldo Lorilla
Rafał Pyrchła
Wayne Daniel Stock**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, seminarians, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are gathered here today in this beautiful Cathedral dedicated under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception to ordain these men, Michael Andrew Friedel, Ron Maldo Lorilla, Rafał Pyrchła and Wayne Daniel Stock, our brothers, to the sacred order of the holy priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Whenever I have the opportunity to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in this Cathedral church, I am always struck by the beauty of this sacred space. I would imagine that you are also inspired by the majestic grandeur of this place. As each of us looks at the holy art designed to turn our thoughts to heavenly realities, there are different points of reference depending on where we are sitting. For those of you in the nave of the

church, your eye is drawn to large icon of the Immaculate Conception above the main altar with the inscription, *Macula non est in te*, Latin for, “There is no stain [of sin] in you.” It is fitting that our eyes are drawn to our Blessed Mother as we seek her intercession for heavenly blessings on our four men to be ordained priests today and as we thank her Son Jesus in this Eucharist for the gift of four new priests to serve our diocese here in central Illinois.

From my perspective here in the *cathedra*, that is, the bishop’s chair, my eyes are drawn to the first three stained glass windows on the north wall of the Cathedral. Some of the most striking and poignant art in our Cathedral is contained in the beautiful stained glass windows that encircle us. Since this is the Cathedral of our State Capital, many of the windows bear witness to the lives of heroic discipleship led by key figures of the Church in relation to secular authorities. As a matter of fact, three of the windows that are most visible from where I sit bear the images of people who truly understood what it meant to live lives of radical discipleship, the very kind of lives that you, my sons to be ordained, will be called to live on a daily basis in your ministry to the people of God as priests.

The first of these windows shows Our Lord giving the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to Saint Peter. In your ministry as priests collaborating with me, your bishop, you too will have the power to bind and loose, particularly through your ministration of the great sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation. Through the salvific washing of Baptism, you will welcome new members into the Church, freeing them from sin and introducing them into the family of God as His adopted sons and daughters. Moreover, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you will, in the words of Saint John Paul II, “learn the weaknesses and falls of the faithful, assess their desire for renewal and efforts to achieve it, discern the action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, and impart to them a forgiveness which God alone can grant.”¹ It is my hope that you will always seek to follow the grace of the Lord at work in the Church and the example of Saint Peter as you undertake this important aspect of your ministry to stand *in persona Christi* and reconcile sinners to our Lord.

The second window on our north wall depicts Saint Ignatius of Antioch in the lion’s den as he faced the opportunity to give the ultimate sacrifice, that of his life, as a martyr of the Church. While I pray that you will not be faced with the reality of physically laying down your life for the

Church, you are called to sacrifice your life in a spiritual way for the good God's people. As priests, you are called on a daily basis to die to yourself and your own desires so that you might place the needs of Christ's faithful first. You are asked to model your lives after the great saints that serve as examples of how to place the well-being of the Church over your own desires and strive to unite your sacrifices more perfectly to those of our Lord each day.

The third window from my perspective is that of Pope Saint Leo the Great confronting Attila the Hun in the year 452, persuading him not to attack the city of Rome and its citizens. At times in your ministry you too will be called upon to protect and defend the Church from the attacks levied against her by secular society. You will be called to bear witness to the teachings of Christ and His Church in the midst of a world that, more than ever, sets itself against the moral teachings of the Church and, in particular, demeans the sacredness of all life from conception to natural death as well as the Christian understanding of marriage and the family. Never be afraid to confront the secular societal standards and to support those entrusted to your care, so that they can center their lives on their eternal home rather than their earthly dwelling.

When I was doing my graduate studies in Rome, my courses were taught in Latin, so I spent a lot of time studying and translating Latin texts. One of those texts was the Sermon on the Ascension given by Pope Saint Leo the Great, which happened to be the second reading yesterday in the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours. When my teacher gave this to me to translate, I did not know that this passage was from the Liturgy of the Hours, so I labored through it, but I am grateful for the opportunity to have encountered the grandeur of the eloquent Latin of Pope Saint Leo the Great. Speaking of our Lord's Ascension to Heaven, which we will observe tomorrow, Pope Saint Leo the Great wrote this in his soaring prose:

With all due solemnity we are commemorating that day on which our poor human nature was carried up, in Christ, above all the hosts of heaven, above all the ranks of angels, beyond the highest heavenly powers to the very throne of God the Father. It is upon this ordered structure of divine acts that we have been firmly established, so that the grace of God may show itself still more marvelous when, in spite of the withdrawal from men's sight of everything that is rightly felt to command their reverence, faith does not fail, hope is not shaken, charity does not grow cold. For such is the power of great minds, such is the light of truly believing souls, that they put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye; they fix their desires on what is beyond sight. . . . Throughout the world women no less than men, tender girls as well as boys, have given their life's blood in the struggle for this faith. It is a faith that has driven out devils, healed the sick and raised the dead.²

My dear sons, soon you will be anointed “with the oil of gladness,”³ “consecrated in truth,”⁴ and united to our Risen Lord in His Sacred Priesthood. It is our prayer that you, like Saint Peter, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, and Pope Saint Leo the Great, will be priestly instruments of reconciliation and forgiveness, examples of what it means to lay down your will for the good of the Church, and ardent defenders of the faith.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Saint John Paul II , Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, December 2, 1984.

² Pope Saint Leo the Great, *Sermo 2 de Ascensione* 1-4; *Patrologia Latina* 54, 397-399; English translation in the Office of Readings for the Friday of the Sixth Week of Easter, *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 2 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), p. 937-938.

³ Isaiah 61:3.

⁴ John 17:19.