

**Homily for the Diaconal Ordination
of Christopher Trummer and the
Presbyteral Ordination of
Deacons David Beagles, Michael Berndt, Peter Chineke,
Michael Meinhart, Michael Trummer, and Dominic Vahling**

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

**The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ
June 19, 2020**

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

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, candidates for ordination, seminarians, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

After a delay of almost a month due to the constraints of the coronavirus pandemic, it is good that we are here at last to celebrate the Diaconal Ordination of Christopher Trummer and the Presbyteral Ordination of Deacons David Beagles, Michael Berndt, Peter Chineke, Michael Meinhart, Michael Trummer, and Dominic Vahling. Together with Fathers Piotr Kosk and Paweł Łuczak, who were ordained by me last month on May 2nd, the total of eight men being ordained to the priesthood for our diocese this year is the largest ordination class in our diocese since 1964, when nine priests were ordained. This is a great blessing for our diocese!

I would like to say a word of introduction to the faithful of our diocese about each of our *ordinandi*.

Christopher Trummer and his brother Michael are the sons of John and Bitsy Trummer. Christopher will be ordained today to the transitional diaconate, while his brother Michael will be ordained a priest. Chris says that he is looking forward to preaching at Mass and spiritually advising people. Michael hopes to get to know the People of God more deeply as he accompanies them and becomes a spiritual father to them.

Michael Berndt is the son of Tom and Dolly Berndt. Michael says that he looks forward to bringing God to people and people to God.

Peter Chineke is the son of Pius and Virginia Chineke. He is open to seeing what God wants to do with him in Our Lord's ministry.

Dominic Vahling is the son of Tom & Cindy Vahling. He is most looking forward to celebrating the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

David Beagles is the son of Howard and the late Mary Anne Beagles. He is looking forward to celebrating Mass and being a confessor.

Michael Meinhart is the son of Joe and Brenda Meinhart. He is also looking forward to celebrating the Mass and being full time in the parish getting to serve God through ministry to His people.

Your aspirations for ministry are inspiring and are exactly what I and the people of our diocese need and desire. Thank you for saying yes to God's call and thank you to your parents for being instruments of that call.

It is very fitting that we celebrate this happy day of ordinations to the priesthood and the diaconate on this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, when we turn our attention to the "meek and humble" heart of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:29). I have had a life-long devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is why my episcopal coat of arms has an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The love poured out from the Sacred Heart of Jesus is also the basis for my episcopal motto, *Lex cordis caritas* – the Law of the heart is love. May we never forget the words of the Psalmist, who reminds us that "the designs of his Heart are from age to age, to rescue [our] souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Psalm 33[32]:11, 19).

Even with this great and certain promise, many people – on account of the many tribulations of these recent weeks during the coronavirus pandemic – needed to hear what Moses said to the people: "It was because

the LORD loved you and because of his fidelity to the oath he had sworn to your fathers, that he brought you out with his strong hand from the place of slavery, and ransomed you from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:8). It is important for us to remember those words: “It was because the LORD loved you...” Indeed, the certainty of his love for us – for you and for me – must become the foundation of our lives.

There are many people today who unfortunately do not know that the Lord loves them. For one reason or another, the truth that “God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” has not yet penetrated and purified the depths of their hearts (I John 4:9). We must help them look upon the pierced side of Christ and understand that “God is love” (I John 4:8). We must help them gaze upon the Sacred Heart of Jesus and learn that he is “merciful and gracious..., slow to anger and abounding in kindness” (Psalm 103:10). We must help them discover the wisdom of love that is “hidden from the wise and the learned” (Matthew 11:25). We must help every person know that the designs of the Lord’s Heart – that his love for them – are from age to age.

Before we can do this, however, we must each know already that the Lord loves us, that the Lord loves me, personally and individually. We must

know that his Heart remains open for us; we must enter into it and make our abode within that Most Sacred Heart. Looking upon his Heart pierced out of love for us, we must allow our hearts to be pierced by his great love for us.

In the 167 year history of this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, we are blessed to have a shining example of a priest declared by the Pope to be “venerable,” who allowed the Lord to pierce his heart, who allowed his heart to be pierced out of love for God and neighbor. More than this, we are confident that he allowed this to happen in a manner greater than what is required of each of us, that he did so in a heroic manner that so marked his life that we now call him a Venerable Servant of God. He is, of course, Father Augustine Tolton, whose grave lies just over one hundred miles west of here in Quincy.

Born a slave in Brush Creek, Missouri on April 1, 1854, young Gus was no fool, but was instead one of the Lord’s “little ones” (Matthew 11:25). As a young boy, he escaped from slavery with his mother and siblings to Quincy, where he grew up, worked in a tobacco factory, and sometimes went to school. He was forced out of St. Boniface School because of the prejudice of some of the white families there. A short time later, he found a peaceful reception at St. Peter School, thanks to the preaching of Father Peter McGirr,

who frequently reminded his flock of the Lord's words: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). As he grew, young Gus began assisting Father McGirr by cleaning the church and teaching the catechism to African American children, which brought the ire of African American Protestant pastors who thought Gus was trying to steal their sheep. Of his time at St. Peter School, he later said, "As long as I was in that school, I was safe. Everyone was kind to me."¹

One day, Father McGirr surprised Gus when he asked if he had thought about becoming a priest. Gus protested that there were no black priests, but Father McGirr told him there may not have been any then in the United States, but there were in other parts of the world. The dream of Gus' heart began to take shape and he applied to seminaries and religious orders, all of which replied, "We are not ready for a Negro student." At long last, through his connections with the Franciscans in Rome, Father McGirr secured Gus a place in Rome at the *Propaganda Fide*, a seminary to form missionaries.

Throughout his five years in the Eternal City, Gus expected to be sent as a missionary to Africa and spent his free time studying African

geography, languages, and cultures. Such was also the intention of the *Propaganda Fide* – because it was thought he might not succeed, being the only African American priest in the U.S.A. – that is, right up until the night before he was ordained a priest. Giovanni Cardinal Simeoni said to him, “America needs Negro priests. America has been called the most enlightened nation. We will see whether it deserves that honor. If the United States has never seen a Black priest, it must see one now.”² So it was that Father Tolton returned not only to the United States, but to Quincy, where he was named Pastor of St. Joseph Parish.

He did not win a lot of African American converts to Catholicism, but still he kept speaking of the designs of the Most Sacred Heart and reminded people of the love of God. Two hundred people – 80% of them white – frequently filled his tiny church to hear him preach. His unexpected popularity – and the financial support of those who were not his parishioners – provoked the jealousy and bigotry of the local Dean. Father Tolton said, “...at first the priests here rejoiced at my arrival; now they wished I were away because too many white people come down to my church from other parishes: I am sorry of course but I can’t drive them away.”³

When the prejudice of a particular brother priest became too much for him to bear, Father Tolton left for Chicago after just three years in Quincy. He ministered in the Windy City for eight years until his death on July 9, 1897 at the age of forty-three. His body was brought back to Quincy and was buried in St. Peter Cemetery, where his remains lie today.

Dear candidates for Ordination, just as the Lord called Father Tolton to conform his heart to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, so He is calling you to do the same through your ordinations to the Orders of Deacons and of Priests. If you look to the heroic virtue of Father Tolton, this holy priest of Jesus Christ will teach you how, again and again, no matter the joys and sufferings you will experience through your ministry, to allow your hearts to be pierced out of love for God and neighbor; he will teach you how to lead others into the Sacred Heart so that they might know how much God loves them. This, after all, is the principal mission of the Diaconate and of the Priesthood.

Dear sons, of what does the heart speak if not friendship? Father Tolton's life of long-suffering was founded on his friendship with Jesus. He drank so deeply from the streams that flow from the Most Sacred Heart, that his friendship with the Lord flowed over into the lives of those he met. "All

were my friends," he said of his days in Rome, and added, "they all loved me, though I cannot say why;" such was his childlike closeness with Jesus. So deeply was he conformed to the Lord, that his heart, too, became meek and humble.⁴

As you begin your ministry of bringing people into friendship with Jesus Christ, or of deepening a friendship already begun, strive to help everyone you encounter realize the love of God by revealing his Sacred Heart to them. Become friends with Father Tolton, and he will teach you the importance of individuals above numbers. He will also help you not to work against your priestly brothers, but to carry out your ministry as best you can and to let your own hearts be pierced out of love for God and his people.

When he left Quincy to begin his ministry in Chicago, Father Tolton said:

Catholics will love and respect a priest regardless of nationality; at least that is the spirit of those people in the Gem City who knew me for twenty-nine years or more. Never will I forget the happy hours spent in the little St. Joseph church. I wish them all the blessings that can be bestowed upon them, for that charitable spirit that they have always shown toward me and the colored children.⁵

We know this be true today, as well. Catholics will love and respect a priest not because of his position, but because he has become a Father to his flock.

Today we pray for you, dear brothers, as you receive Holy Orders and are conformed more closely to the heart of Jesus. From this day forward, in all that you do, embrace the humble example of Father Tolton and help all to come to know that God loves them by revealing to them the designs of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our Great High Priest.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ In Roy Bauer, *They Called Him Father Gus: The Life and Times of Augustine Tolton, First Black Priest in the U.S.A.*, Part Eight.

² In Caroline Hemasath, O.S.F., *From Slave to Priest: A Biography of the Rev. Augustus Tolton (1854-1897), First Afro-American Priest of the United States* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 104.

³ Augustus Tolton, Letter to Archbishop Gibbons, July 24, 1888.

⁴ Quoted in *St. Joseph's Advocate* (January 1888) Sixth Year, No. 1, 322-323, 326.

⁵ Quoted by *The Quincy Daily Journal*, November 13, 1889.