

**Homily for the Ordination of Deacons**

**Paul L. Lesupati  
Zachary D. Samples**

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

**April 9, 2021**

**† 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 for us to be here for the ordination of Paul Lesupati and Zachary Samples to the diaconate, as the next major step on their path to the ministerial priesthood, which, God willing, will take place a year from now.

Paul Lesupati is a native of Kenya whose connection to our diocese came through Father Jeff Grant, Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish here in Springfield, during his sabbatical in Kenya from September of 2016 to March of 2017. At the time, Paul was a social worker with Jesuit Refugee Services, assisting refugees and those displaced from their countries because of war. In the article about Paul and Zach in the current issue of *Catholic Times*, Paul noted that he was born while his mother was herding and tending the cows and goats. He described his upbringing by saying, "We are pastoralists,"

noting that much can be learned about life while working alongside parents who take care of sheep and goats, especially “those who are sick, lame and also the stubborn ones.” I am sure, Paul, that you will find many opportunities in our diocese to minister to the sick, the lame, and yes, even some stubborn ones!

I also wish to take this opportunity to express my greetings and gratitude to members of Paul’s family who could not be present with us today in person, especially his parents, who are participating by livestream video. We appreciate your sharing your son and brother as a missionary of Our Lord with us in a distant land. While we are separated by a vast ocean, we are spiritually close to each other in our prayers and our shared faith.

Zach Samples’ roots and upbringing are more proximate, as he grew up with his family as parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Decatur. After attending Mount Zion High School, Zach earned both his bachelor’s degree in history and his master’s degree in college student affairs at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston. Zach traces his vocation to an experience of feeling called by Our Lord during Eucharistic adoration. That experience radically changed his life, as Our Lord has an uncanny way of doing since

the time when He called His first disciples with the simple invitation, "Come, follow me."

When our souls are cleared of the clutter that clogs our hearing of the Lord speaking to us, His call is irresistible. I am grateful to Paul and Zach for listening to the voice of Our Most Holy Redeemer and saying yes to His call. You will have a profound impact on countless lives in the years ahead through your ordained ministry, many more than you may realize.

To illustrate the impact that one person can have on the life of another, I would like to tell you a story. As I have mentioned on many occasions, I am an avid reader of books about Abraham Lincoln. In all my reading of Lincoln biographies and commentaries, one story I had never come across was recently shared with me by Father Seth Brown, Parochial Vicar at Blessed Sacrament parish here in Springfield. The story goes like this:

On a crowded New Jersey train platform in 1863, a young man stood in a swarm of passengers jostling to buy their tickets before the train's departure. In the flurry of confusion and activity, the young man was knocked off balance, and slipped into the narrow gap between the platform and the train.

Before he could pull himself up and out of danger, the locomotive lurched forward, catching his jacket, and began to drag the man down the track. But before he could be dragged to death or fall underneath the iron wheels, the man felt a firm hand brusquely grip the collar of his coat and vigorously heave him back up to safety.

Turning around, the young man recognized his rescuer: Edwin Booth, the most famous actor of his day. The young man said, "Mr. Booth I know who you are, but you do not know who I am: Robert Todd Lincoln, son of President Lincoln, at your service." The two talked briefly before going their separate ways; they would never see each other again.

Two years later, Edwin Booth's brother, John Wilkes Booth, would assassinate Robert Lincoln's father, President Abraham Lincoln, on Good Friday of 1865.

Unlike his brother, Edwin supported Lincoln and was distraught not only that the president had been assassinated, but that it had come by the hand of his own flesh and blood.

He sank into a deep depression, and refused to return to the stage for more than a year. He even contemplated suicide.

But Booth told his friends that the one thought that saved him, the single consideration that stopped him from taking his own life, was the memory of saving the life of Robert Lincoln.

Now let's shift the scene.

It's daybreak.

And the Light of the World awaits His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in a time and place of transition; passing from water to land, night to day, betrayal to fidelity, death to life, and former ways to an uncertain future of what it now means to be a disciple of the risen Lord. From catching nothing to being overwhelmed with the catch.

The Resurrected Jesus had first appeared to the eleven in the upper room, giving them his peace and the authority to forgive sins. And then Jesus sends them out, saying, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He launches them out to offer His peace and reconciling love to the fledgling Church and a hostile world.

But the disciples don't go anywhere but home.

Confused and afraid, they don't know what to do; so they do what they know. Instead of venturing out to proclaim the good news of the Risen Christ, they return to Galilee and to fishing.

Curiously, John tells us there are only seven of them. Seven, not Eleven, which means there is already a problem.

They were already coming apart at the seams, some going in one direction, some in another. And the seven remaining apostles return to what they know: fishing. It was their occupation before Jesus showed up, their way of life before they met Him, the only thing they know how to do without Him.

With their Lord seemingly absent, it seems for them right to get on with life. Memory is one thing, the future another.

Until they hear a familiar voice.

They cannot see who it is, but whoever it is calls across the water and tells them a truth they already know but that He should not know – that they have no fish. Then He tells them to try the other side of the boat. They do.

And the water roils with fish jumping into their nets.

As the saying goes, it's *déjà vu* all over again: the boats, the nets, the stranger calling out to them, calling them to Himself: Come.

Which is, you will remember, exactly how they started on their adventure with Jesus at the beginning not of John's Gospel, but of the other

three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus called them, fishermen on their boats, to follow his voice, to come ashore, and spend time with him.

John ends his Gospel with this scene to provide the disciples with a familiar but new beginning. Confused and sliding back into their previous lives, Jesus transforms their place of spiritual regression into a lesson in mission, providing an illustration of how the new ministers of the Church will live and what they will do.

This, and the fiery, fortifying descent of the Holy Spirit, will turn a ragtag group of weak men into fearless proclaimers of the Resurrection to the point of martyrdom.

So what Jesus reveals then and there to them is intended just as much for us here and now. We too, by listening to and meditating on this final scene in John's Gospel, will see and hear Jesus tell us how we, too, may more faithfully and more zealously live as Christ's ordained ministers.

Such a life is, as seen in the Gospel, dependent on prayer, on listening to the voice of Jesus, and doing what He asks of you. For this reason, Paul and Zach, you will soon promise to "maintain and deepen the spirit of prayer that is proper" to this new way of life. You will pray the liturgy of the hours for yourselves and God's people. You will commit yourselves to

celibacy as a sign of your dedication to Christ the Lord for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, in the obedient service of God and man to fulfill the mission entrusted to you by your diocesan bishop as successors of the apostles.

What then did He ask of his disciples? To “haul” or “draw in” the catch He provided, which is easier said than done. Jesus uses this same word for “haul” or “draw in” two other times in John’s Gospel.

The first is in Chapter 6 during his Bread of Life Discourse, His teaching on the Eucharist where He says: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” (6:44).

The second occurs during Jesus’ final prediction of his passion before the Last Supper: And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

Here, at the end of the Gospel, Jesus reminds his ministers where and how He will draw in His catch: through His passion and death as well as its re-presentation in the liturgy. It is to this mystery of Christ’s life that you will promise to conform your own lives.



But here they do not recognize the Lord until they had caught the fish. It is only after their nets are full that the Disciple whom Jesus loved exclaims to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

Yes, it is a miracle, reminiscent of the signs Jesus had worked during His ministry to reveal who He was and why He came, but it also presents a lesson for those of us called to ordained ministry.

We recognize Jesus' call in our own lives when our nets are full, when we are immersed in our vocation of being fishers of men, not in backsliding into former ways of life.

Then they bring what they have before Jesus and offer it to him, sitting down to a meal in which Jesus takes bread and gives it to them. The Eucharistic theme is unmistakable, and the mission He gives to His ministers is to be faithful stewards of the holy mysteries. Here is another of your ordination promises: to assist at the liturgy and allow Christ's own charity.

Under each of these, the Gospel, and the promises you will soon make, like Christ himself, you must dwell with his people in a place of transition, the place of passing from one place to another. You, as deacons and then next year as priests, will be called to live with and minister to people on their best days and on their worst days.

Yet even on your best days and worst days, the Holy Spirit will be with you and guide you in your ministry, like the day when Peter and John are arrested, yet more than 5,000 become believers. Peter too preaches to all present at his hearing that there is no salvation outside Christ.

You will be on mission, constantly passing from darkness to light, death to life, sorrow to joy. You will bring, and represent, Christ.

This will be your salvation.

Like Peter and the apostles, like Edwin Booth, by reaching out and raising up others out of danger and into new life, you will save your own life. For this you will make your ordination promises and devote your life. And after a lifetime of fishing for men and dining with the Lord at the altar, may He say to you, and to all present here, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

May God give us this grace. Amen.