

June 24, 2017 ` 10:00 a.m.` St. Augustine Cathedral

**Ordination to the Order of Presbyter for**

**Jeffrey David Hanley and Maximilian Jacob Nightingale**

*Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist*

*(Is. 49:1-6; Acts 13:22-26; Lk. 1:57f.)*

Praised be Jesus Christ!

What a great day to come together on this beautiful June morning, to celebrate one of the happiest moments in the life of any Local Church---the ordination of two new priests of Jesus Christ. But in addition to that, we do so on this beautiful Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist---one of only three Birthdays we get to celebrate in our Liturgical Calendar each year, the other two of course being Jesus' Birthday (on Christmas) and our Blessed Mother's Birthday on September 8<sup>th</sup>. And both the joy of this Ordination and the joy of today's great Feast are rooted in the Joy-filled and Faith-filled celebration of the Lord's Presence among us, in Word and Sacrament, in this Holy Eucharist.

What a perfect Feast to celebrate an Ordination. John the Baptist---one of those somewhat mysterious and mightily revered figures in the Gospels---a Cousin of Jesus---the Forerunner of the Messiah---the primordial Herald of the Good News of Jesus---as our Scripture Readings for this morning have told us, was called by God "*from birth*". We heard Isaiah say, referring to himself but foreshadowing John the Baptist as well as Jesus, "*from my mother's womb He (the Lord) gave me my name.*" In the case of today's Feast, on the occasion of his circumcision and his official "naming", in the face of all the relatives' pressure to do otherwise, both Elizabeth and Zachary insisted: "*His name is John!*" That is exactly what the Archangel had directed Zachary to do as John was about to be conceived.

As we join with the entire Church in celebrating the Vocation of John the Baptist, we celebrate today the Vocations of two of our own who were both "called by God from birth", and who, at a particular time in each of their lives, heard God's Call and said Yes! And now today, as we heard in the little "dialogue" that Msgr. Osborn and I just had, "after inquiry among the Christian people (which includes all of you) and upon the recommendation of those responsible" (their seminary formators and diocesan superiors over these years of their formation and education), these two young men have been found worthy to be advanced to Priesthood. And to that request, the Church proudly and joyfully also says: "Yes!" The thunderous applause that filled this Cathedral Church just a few moments ago is the culmination of their Yes, our Yes, and the Church's Yes as we now prepare to ordain them Priests of Jesus Christ!

In that spirit and for those reasons, we welcome all of you to our Cathedral Church this morning for this momentous occasion. In particular I want to welcome: Bishop Murray, our Bishop Emeritus; Bishop Dominic Kimengich, Bishop of Lodwar in Kenya, the Bishop of our "sister Diocese" and a dear friend to so many of us---we're so happy that his visit happens to coincide with this happy occasion in our Diocese; my brother priests from our own presbyterate who are here in such great numbers, along with my brother deacons who are joining us. In particular I would like to greet via the internet live-streaming of this Ordination one of our priests, Fr. Bruno Okoli, who has been back in his homeland of Nigeria due to some immigration issues. I spoke with Fr. Bruno yesterday and he assured me he would be here with us via the internet --Fr. Bruno, we all send you our fraternal prayers and best wishes---we miss you!

I am very pleased to welcome so many visiting priests and deacons from many different parts of the country, and beyond; in particular, Father John Cush, Academic Dean at the North American College in Rome where Jeff and Max studied for these past 3 years; Father Paul Raftery from Thomas Aquinas College in southern California where Max and Jeff received their undergraduate degrees; and among Max and Jeff's several classmates and priest-friends here with us, one has come from Toronto (via Rome) and another from Liverpool, England

Of course, I am very happy to welcome the parishioners of Max's and Jeff's home parishes, St. Joseph Parish in St. Joseph and Sts. John and Bernard Parish in Benton Harbor, along with their pastor and our Vicar for Clergy, Father Robert Creagan. We're so glad you're all here.

And most of all, I am so very happy to welcome all the dear friends, relatives and immediate family members of Max and Jeff who are here today. Especially I want to recognize Jeff's siblings, and most of all his parents, Tom and Peggy Hanley. Also Max's siblings, and his mother, Liz, and his father and step mother Robert and Kelly.

As today's Feast reminds us, it is God Who calls us "from birth"; He calls us by name to be in relationship with Him; God calls us with a very particular vocation in mind for each of us---the one that is best suited for us to help us respond well to God in our lives and to help us to get to Heaven, which of course is the ultimate Goal for each of us. How we respond to God, or even if some people ever respond to God, depends on many circumstances and factors, the most important of which are our families.

Jeff and Max have been blessed to have had their family's support and their fellow parishioners' encouragement over all the years that they have been discerning their vocation, and so for that reason, the whole Church is grateful to you, the Nightingale Family and the Hanley Family and the Parish Families of St. Joseph Parish, St. Joseph and Sts. John and Bernard Parish, Benton Harbor, most especially through the powerful prayer support that has consistently resulted from the perpetual Eucharistic Adoration Chapel at St. Joseph Parish where people from the St. Joseph and Benton Harbor pray around the clock for Vocations and other special needs. In that regard, on this special day, I would ask all families here present today to encourage your children, or those young people you know who may possibly be inclined toward a religious vocation, to stop and listen for whatever the Call is that God is surely making to each of them.

And so, Jeff and Max, my dear sons in the Lord, we are all here to rejoice with you; we are all here to pray for you; we are all here to support you and let you know how grateful we, in the name of the whole Church, are to you for saying "Present" when you were called, and for being present, as well as willing, ready and judged to be capable of assuming the office of Priest to join together with the other priests in our presbyterate united with me as Bishop in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, in service to the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo. And so, most of all---as the reasons why we're here this morning---I want to welcome YOU, Jeff and Max, and in turn, to give praise to God for all that He has done to bring both of you to this joyful and happy day for you, for us, and for the Church.

You know, as an aside, one of the reasons why our Ordination date is this late in June is because Max and Jeff just finished their studies and exams this past week at the North American College in Rome. In fact, they just flew into Chicago late Thursday afternoon. So if they look a little jet-lagged and you notice bags under their eyes, that might be why. But I'm happy to assure you that they both passed their exams with flying colors, so we're good to go!

Today's Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist and our gathering to celebrate Ordinations to the Priesthood verify the fact that God "calls" constantly. The question is: do we listen? Do we take the time to hear His "call"? Do we drown out God's "call" by all the other "noises" in our lives? My dear sons, Jeff and Max, your response to God's call is an encouragement to all of us.

In just a few moments, I will ask you to answer six very important questions----(and you thought all your tests were done! ☺ ). I will ask you if you "resolve" to fulfill the office of Priesthood in union with me in my Office as Bishop?; I will ask if you resolve to proclaim God's Word faithfully, and celebrate the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, worthily and well; I will ask if you resolve to pray for the Church---for your people---to "implore" God to shower His mercy upon the people entrusted to your care, and to consecrate yourselves completely to God. And I will ask you to promise me, and my successors, respect and obedience. Those are not easy promises to make and to faithfully keep, perhaps especially the promise of obedience and respect----unless, we are completely united with Christ, and unless you open yourselves completely to the help and strength of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist grew up and became the one to Prepare the way for the Lord---the one to point out: "*Look, there is the Lamb of God!*". The Gospels reveal him as a "*voice crying out in the wilderness*".

Whether it was the wilderness of the desert in John's day and time, or whether it's the "wilderness" of the world of secularism and relativism that you will certainly experience as you proclaim the Joy of the Gospel in our own day and time, you will encounter those who will welcome you and those who will choose to ignore you. Yet, your calling is to remain faithful to the promises you are about to make, and to do whatever it takes to bring the Love of Christ to those who so desperately need it.

Having heard God's "call" in your own lives, and having responded to that "call" through your years of discernment and formation, you now are to become the "callers"----those who are the proclaimers of God's Word and the Teachings of the Church. Like John the Baptist, you will be Heralds of Hope and Missionary Disciples to those in our churches, and perhaps even more so, to those who are not in our churches. The challenges will be great, but the joys will be even greater as long as you remember that you, like John the Baptist, must "decrease" as you make every effort to allow Jesus and His Gospel to "increase".

In just a few moments, you will prostrate on the floor of this Cathedral, which is one of the most profound parts of this Ordination Rite, which exemplifies the gift of your very selves to God and to the Church; the image of dying to self, so that you can rise in Jesus as His Priest. During that time of profound submission of both your body and your spirit, we will all be right here, surrounding you in faith, and praying intensely for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of all the Saints in Heaven to guard and fortify you so you will be up to this new Vocation of Priestly service. The act of prostration is also the reminder that your life as a Priest of Jesus Christ is one of absolute service. It was Jesus Himself Who got down on His hands and knees at the Last Supper to teach the Apostles, His first priests, what it means to serve others as He does----as He poured Himself out in love for ALL people in His deeds, through every fiber of His being, and in the giving of His life and shedding of His blood on the Cross.

Yet, Jeff and Max, it is that very act of Jesus' pouring out of Himself that becomes for every priest the greatest privilege of all: because as you celebrate the Mass, you will make Christ Present again and again, each and every day of your priestly lives through the unbloody

Sacrifice of Calvary in every Holy Eucharist, and you will bring Jesus' Love and Mercy to those sinners who seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance.

As you lay prostrate on this Cathedral floor, please remember what it is that you will be called to do---privileged to do---what you are desperately needed to do--- when you arise from the floor. Because at that point, and through the laying on of my hands, you will be essentially, profoundly and forever changed into Priests of Jesus Christ!

John the Baptist had a calling that was indeed profound and important. But **He** only prepared the way for Jesus. As an ordained priest, you will be one who is entrusted with that great mission of being Christ for others---an "alter Christus"----to allow those to whom you are sent to know Jesus' Love and Mercy, wherever that mission sends you, and no matter what the circumstances are.

As the new document on Priestly Formation puts it, quoting Pope Francis, "Priests are 'missionary disciples' who are 'in love with' the Master, shepherds with the 'smell of the sheep', who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ." In other words, Max and Jeff, as well as my brother priests, and to myself as well, our "formation" is never ending, and we are always "on mission". Our biggest disservice to our people and the biggest mistake we can make is to think we can just sit back and relax, or that we have no need to learn or grow.

Whether you are finishing your graduate studies, or whether you are the pastor of 3 parishes in a Collaborative; whether you are a brand new priest, or a priest like our dear departed Fr. Don Potts whom we just laid to rest after 57 years of priestly ministry; whether you are young and vibrant, just starting out on the Mission, or if you've been in the ministry, in multiple assignments for decades, ALL priests are called to teach, to lead, and to sanctify in the Name of Jesus----not as individuals or as free agents, and certainly not in our own name; but as a member of a Presbyterate of priests, united together with their Bishop and in union with the Holy Father, doing the work of the Church in the Name of Jesus.

This is truly a day to rejoice as we give thanks for the saintly and heroic life of John the Baptist AND as we rejoice in these two men---your sons and our brothers---who are about to be ordained priests.

Jeff and Max, you are never alone. You are surrounded by those who love you and are cheering you on, including all of us here with you today. You are prayed for constantly by that great "cloud of witnesses" among the Communion of the Saints in Heaven. You will be watched over especially by our dear Blessed Mother, the Mother of all Priests, who will truly make sure that she does everything possible to keep you close to her Son, Jesus the Good Shepherd.

But in addition to all those resources and helps you will receive from so many other sources, what is most important of all is for you to remain "in love with the Master" as we heard Pope Francis write so beautifully, and to grow in that Love each and every day of your priestly life. It is most important of all that you remain faithful to your daily prayer, and to grow in holiness, so that, in turn, (as we will pray in the Preface for today's Mass for Ordination) you will be able to "lead God's people in charity, nourish them with God's Holy Word, and renew them through the Sacraments".

Finally, my dear sons, be priests who are filled with the Love of Christ and the Joy of the Gospel, and your lives will not only be happy, but your Vocation of "calling others to follow

Jesus” will be blessed and fulfilled. *Sitis sacerdotes laeti, generosi, et sancti in diebus omnibus vestris. Ad multos annos!* (Translation from the Latin: May you be joyful, generous and holy priests all the days of your lives. May you live for many years!) Amen!

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley

Bishop of Kalamazoo