

September 16, 2017, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian

10:00 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Ordination of 13 Permanent Deacons: Jason Aiello, James Bauer, Don Bouchard, Brian Kaluzny, Tim Kistka, David Krajewski, Ed LaRoche, Duane Poage, Ed Nickel, Alberto Rivera-Gutierrez, Phil Sirk, Alan Sosinski, John Wielgos

Scripture Readings: Jer.1:4-9; Acts 6:1-7b; Jn 15:9-17

On this very joyful day for the whole Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, I am so happy to greet all of you on this beautiful late-summer day, and I am particularly pleased to greet: Bishop Murray...Emeritus Bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo.....all my brother priests and deacons from our own Diocese who are here with us this morning, and in particular, the pastors of the home parishes of our 13 Deacon Candidates. In addition, I am very pleased to welcome those visiting priests and deacons who are here with us from other dioceses---- and in particular, Father Tom Florek, S.J., from Detroit, one of our Candidates' spiritual director, Fr. Paschal Mary Yohe from Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Alabama, and Deacon Stan Lemieux and his wife, who is the Director of the Deacon Formation program in the Diocese of Ft.Wayne/South Bend, which has helped to form one of our candidates. I welcome our worthy State Deputy of the Knights of Columbus Ken Unterbrink and his wife Eleanor, as well as the worthy past State Deputy Mike Malinowski and his wife Maureen. I extend a warm and special welcome to the parents, family members, relatives, friends and fellow parishioners of our 13 Deacon Candidates. And most especially, I am so pleased to welcome the wives, children, in-laws and grandchildren of those to be ordained deacons here this morning. Finally I would like to say a special word of welcome to Theresa Stutz and her family, and well as Mary Reck and her family, who are here with us this morning. Theresa's dear departed husband, Doug, and Mary's dear departed husband Andy, were members of this Class of 2017 until their untimely deaths along the way. May they both rest in peace. We know that Doug and Andy are rejoicing with all of you from their Heavenly vantage point. On this truly joyful day, Welcome to one and all to our Cathedral Church---*the Mother Church*----of our Diocese for this very special Ordination Mass.

My dear Sons in the Lord Jesus: I know that this is a very happy day for each of you, but I'm guessing that you might be just a little "nervous" at this point as you

find yourselves at the **threshold** of being ordained as Deacons of the Church. This is what you have felt “called” to by God for a very long time, but now that it’s here---now that you’re at the threshold---you might find it just a little hard to believe--and maybe you’re a little nervous. But, not only have YOU heard God calling you, but---after 6 years of rather rigorous training and spiritual formation--- the CHURCH has called you as well. As Msgr. Martin assured me in that little dialogue we just had, following “inquiry among the Christian people and upon the recommendation of those responsible (that is, your pastors, your formators, your spiritual directors, your instructors, and your families)---after all that you have gone through with the help, support and encouragement of many along the way, you have been found worthy”. And so the Church “elects” you, that is, formally chooses you; to become ordained and counted among the Clergy; and from the sound of the applause that thundered through this Cathedral, it’s pretty clear that everyone else supports that choice as well. When Deacon John called each of your names, and you responded “Present”, that “split second” represents the all that took place during the six years of formal preparation, which came only after all the years that preceded them in which you wondered, doubted, prayed and discerned before even applying to be considered into the preparation program. In other words, this is no “snap” decision; rather, this moment comes only after being as certain as one can be that this is God’s will for you.

It sounds a lot like our First Reading this morning, doesn’t it, from the Prophet Jeremiah? Jeremiah is reflecting on his own “calling” from God to be God’s Prophet. Jeremiah was more than “just a little nervous” at this possibility. He didn’t feel that he was worthy of that “calling”; he didn’t sense that he was competent enough for that “calling”; he didn’t think that he was old enough, or experienced enough, or holy enough for him to be up to the challenge of being God’s Prophet. But we heard God say to Jeremiah: *“Before you were even formed in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I appointed you to this position....Don’t look for excuses, such as ‘I am too young’---To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak; Have no fear...because I am with you.”*

“Have no fear---I am with you!” That says it all, doesn’t it?

The Ordination Rite that we will all witness very shortly, and that you, my dear brothers are about to personally experience, is as ancient as our 2,000 year old Church is. As we heard in this morning’s Second Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles themselves recognized the need for men to be set apart for

the works of charity and service in the early Church, and to assist the Apostles in their ministry as the first Bishops/Priests. After seven “worthy men” had been found, the Apostles ***laid their hands*** on the first Deacons of the infant Church, and the Diaconate came to be.

You, dear Candidates, will very shortly experience that ancient, yet ever-new rite of the ***Laying on of Hands*** by me, a Successor to the Apostles---and, in turn, you will become successors to Stephen, Philip, Prochurus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas.

As we will hear in the Instruction in just a few moments, Deacons are to *“help the Bishop and his Priests in the ministry of the word, of the altar, and of charity, showing themselves to be servants to all.”* That’s quite a mandate! Even as your Baptism incorporated you into the Body of Christ and committed you to faithfully follow Jesus throughout your lives, and even as you have further committed yourselves to your spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage, bearing fruit in your children and in your family life, so **this** Sacrament of Holy Orders that you are about to receive sets you apart for service to God’s people in the Name of Jesus. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it: this Sacrament *“marks you with an imprint (that is, “a character”) which cannot be removed and which **configures you to Christ**, who made Himself the “deacon”, or Servant, of all.”* (#1570)

As we heard Jesus tell us in this morning’s Gospel passage from St. John: *“This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”*

While Jesus gives this challenging command of loving one another to ALL who choose to follow Him, you, my dear Sons, who are called to be “configured with Christ” through Holy Orders, are called to enter into a truly special “Friendship” with Jesus. Through Holy Orders, you are bound together with me as your Bishop in this Local Church in cooperation with our priests; and we are the first to be called to lay down our lives in imitation of Jesus, the Head, with Whom we are sacramentally configured, for the sake of His Body, the Church.

So, if you’re feeling a little bit of “nervousness”, that’s perfectly understandable. But, I hope that more than nervousness, you are at this moment excited, enthused, and hardly able to contain your love for Jesus and His

Church; I hope that you are absolutely committed to faithfully carrying out your ordained ministry in the Name of Jesus for the rest of your lives..

These are very challenging times in which we are living----politically, economically, morally and spiritually. You are being ordained at a time of growing secularism and diminishing sense of faith and morals throughout our society. But as with every challenge, there is great opportunity.

Pope Francis, Christ's Vicar and our Holy Father, continually challenges all of us to embrace the Gospel with Joy, and to never allow discouragement or difficulties, to keep us from that relationship of intimate Friendship with Jesus to which we are called. As Pope Francis wrote so beautifully in his landmark Apostolic Exhortation *"The Joy of the Gospel"* to those of us in Holy Orders charged with preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ: *"We are not asked to be flawless, but to keep growing, and wanting to grow, as we advance along the path of the Gospel...What is essential is that the Preacher be certain that God loves him, that Jesus Christ has saved him and that his love has always the last word."* (#151) In other words, it is most important that we are "on fire" with our Love for Jesus, and that "fire" will help to ignite and set others on Fire as well.

Right after Mass this morning, you will be given your first Deacon assignment. As you begin to exercise your ministry of Word and Charity, you must, first, last and always, show everyone you meet the joy of this intimate Friendship you share with Jesus through His Church, and then to teach the world anew the Good News of Jesus Christ----to preach, both by using words and by giving witness, the Gospel of Christ's Victory over sin and death, the Glory of the Resurrection and Hope in the Life of the world to come.

Dear Friends, all of us baptized into Christ share in the responsibility of living our faith with conviction, inspiring others to live in the Hope of the Gospel, and to be missionary disciples in the name of Jesus to all those in our lives who feel no need for, or are perhaps not even aware of, what the Church has to offer to them. But for **you**, dear brothers in Christ, your responsibilities build upon that same baptismal responsibility we all share, along with continuing to live the remainder of your lives as good and loving husbands, fathers and grandfathers of your families; but now also as vibrant, effective and faithful Deacons of the Church.

As we know, yesterday was the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. As such that Feast reminded us that our Blessed Mother's life, as privileged as she was to be

the Mother of God, was also one that had more than its share of suffering and heartache, including this moment captured here on the Reredos of our Cathedral Church, standing at the Foot of the Cross. But it was Mary's absolute love for her Son and her Lord, Jesus, and her willingness to say "Yes" no matter what was asked, that enabled her to not only endure those sorrows, from giving Birth to Jesus in a stable to laying His human Body to rest in a borrowed Tomb, but also was able to see in faith that, with Jesus, our sorrows will lead us ultimately to Joy.

My brothers, we must have that same faithfulness as our Blessed Mother did; we must be willing to say "Yes" to whatever the Lord asks of us. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows, and our own Diocesan patron, St. Augustine, may God's Holy Spirit fill you with courage, conviction, and compassion as you lay down your lives in loving service for all those in need of Jesus' saving and redeeming Love.

God bless you, now and always!