

You are called to a mission of mercy

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

June 4, 2016

Ordination of Priests
St. Mary's Cathedral
Fargo, ND

Dear friends, I welcome you to St. Mary's Cathedral for this joyful day in the life of the Church, for the ordination of three new priests. I first welcome my brother priests and deacons, especially the faculty members and formators from St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, St. John Vianney Seminary in Denver, and Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I welcome our dear seminarians and consecrated religious sisters and brothers. I welcome all the faithful who have come in such great numbers this morning. And in a special way, I welcome the parents, family, and friends of our three ordinandi. Dear brothers and sisters, welcome to one and all.

This celebration comes at an important moment in the life of the Church. We are in the midst of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, a time to contemplate the infinite mercy of God and to live as instruments of mercy in the world. In fact, the priesthood itself is a manifestation of God's mercy, because every new priest is a living image of Jesus Christ. And every ordination is a sign of his promise that he would be with us always, even to the end of the age. In his priests, Jesus is with us, he continues to exercise mercy, and he leads us to the joy of eternal life.

Through sacred ordination, the priest is consecrated, configured to Christ himself, and sent forth to preach the Gospel in the name of Christ, to shepherd God's people, and to celebrate the liturgy, especially the Lord's Sacrifice. He is made one with Christ, who is the mercy of God incarnate.

And now, dear sons, you are to be raised to the Order of the Priesthood. Yes, raised to the priesthood, but you must also be ready to die to yourself so that Christ may live in and through you. In a few moments, you will lie prostrate on this sanctuary floor, surrounded by the prayers of God's people and all the angels and saints. Like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, you will rise up and, by the grace of God, bring forth enduring fruit in God's Kingdom, especially the fruit of mercy.

In God's providence, you are beginning your priesthood in the Jubilee of Mercy called by Pope Francis, an extraordinary time of grace for you and for all those you will serve. Our Holy Father tells us that priests are called to be "faithful servants of God's mercy." Just as Jesus is "the face of the Father's mercy," the priest who stands in the place of Christ, who speaks and acts *in persona Christi*, must also become "the face of the Father's mercy." You are his face in the world; you are to become the image of Jesus Christ. When people see you, they will be looking for Jesus. That means you must become humble and gentle, patient and kind, generous and open. In short, you must be men of mercy.

As teachers of the faith, you will be "consecrated in truth" to preach the Gospel of Christ. Out of mercy, Jesus preached to the multitudes and opened to them the beauty and fullness of God's love and truth. You too must preach that same truth, that same merciful love of God for his people. Our Lord looked out on the vast crowds who were hungry, and in his mercy, he fed them with the loaves and fishes. Now, he will call upon you to feed them with a more sublime food, with his own Body and Blood, the food of mercy for starving souls. Again and again, Jesus healed those who were sick, the blind, the leper, the paralyzed, and he healed the greatest sickness of all, the wound of sin. Now he will send you forth as a

minister of mercy, one who will forgive sins in his name, who will restore life and health to souls that are wounded and even dead in sin. As our Holy Father has said to all priests, “Imitate the Father who never tires of forgiving.”

My sons, as you begin your priestly ministry, think of the great priests who have gone before you, whose ranks you now join. St. John Vianney, who spent endless hours in the confessional, reconciling souls to our merciful God. St. Philip Neri, who reached out to the poor and the despairing, who preached Christ with a joy that was uplifting and infectious. St. Maximilian Kolbe, who stepped forward and took the place of a condemned man, who gave his life for another, and who brought light and comfort to the darkness of Auschwitz. St. Junipero Serra, who left home and family behind to bring the Good News of Christ to the New World, to brothers and sisters who had never even heard the name of Jesus. And many, many others.

These were men of mercy, they brought to life the mercy of God, and now you too are called to that same mission of mercy. In everything you do, try to bring God’s tenderness and mercy to the people you meet. Wherever you are, strive to make the mercy of God real and present. The priest needs to be the face of Jesus for others. The priest needs to act as Jesus would act – giving himself to others with the loving heart of a servant; praying for people and interceding for them; showing everyone the compassion of God.

So my dear friends, let us pray for our brothers as they receive this great sacrament that will configure them to Jesus Christ, the High Priest and the Good Shepherd, who came in mercy to seek the lost and to carry them home to the Father who loves them. And let us ask our Blessed Mother, in the love of her Immaculate Heart, to watch over her sons, our new priests.

Finally, my dear sons, keep always before your eyes the face of Jesus, who calls you out of love and sends you for love, who came not to be served but to serve, and who came to seek out and save what was lost.