

Jesus has called you to share in his own priesthood

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

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Priesthood Ordination
Cathedral of St. Mary
Fargo, ND

Dear brothers and sisters, I welcome everyone here to St. Mary's Cathedral for this great day in the Diocese of Fargo. I first welcome my brother priests, and I thank you for your presence and your support of our new brothers. I offer a special welcome and thanks to the priest representatives of St. Paul Seminary and Mount St. Mary Seminary, where these men have been formed for the last several years. I welcome our deacons and religious, our seminarians, and all the faithful and visitors who have come for this joyful event. And I especially welcome the parents and family members of our new priests. You have played a key role in their lives, and you now offer them as a wonderful gift to Christ and his Church. We thank you for sharing your sons and brothers with us, with the entire family of God.

Every new priest is a living image of Jesus Christ. And every ordination is a fulfillment of his final promise – that he will be with us always, even until the end of the age. My dear brothers, Jesus has called each of you by name – Paul, Scott, and Jayson. He has spoken to your hearts, and he has called each of you in a particular way to be his friends, to follow in his footsteps, and to make his path the path of your life.

Jesus has called you to share in his own priesthood and to continue his mission. We heard that powerful commission in the Gospel reading for today: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” My brothers, Jesus asks you to carry forward and bring to fulfillment what he has begun. Today you are ordained as his priests, consecrated in his Holy Name, by his Holy Spirit, consecrated to act in his place, and with his power for the sanctification of the world.

You are not ordained for a mission that is limited to the boundaries of just one parish, or even of this diocese. You will share in the universal mission of salvation that Jesus entrusted to his apostles and to his Church. Through your priestly life and ministry, the living waters of God's grace and truth will continue to flow like a pure river through our times and through our lives. Through your ministry, the eternal sacrifice of Christ will be offered on this holy altar, and on the altar of every heart that believes in him. Through your ministry of mercy, the sins of your brothers and sisters will be forgiven and their lives will be renewed.

My dear sons and brothers, today you begin a great adventure, one that will have its challenges but that will always be guided by Jesus himself. He has a special claim on you, but you have a special claim on him, and he will never abandon you. Jesus came to be a servant to all, and you must follow his lead. He calls you now to serve as he served and to love as he loved, putting aside your own concerns and embracing your brothers and sisters in all their needs. You will now be his face in the world, you will be the image of Jesus to those who know him and to those who don't. That is a theological and spiritual reality, and it bestows on you a grave responsibility.

When people see you, they will be looking for Jesus. That means you must represent Jesus to everyone you encounter, wherever you are. You must be humble and gentle, patient and kind, generous and forgiving. As an *alter Christus*, the priest must always be Christ for others, acting as Jesus would act, giving himself to others with the loving heart of a servant and with the dedication of a faithful shepherd. As our Lord prayed and interceded for his people to his Father, so you must pray. And, as he constantly manifested the compassion and mercy of the Father, so must you offer the compassion, mercy, and healing of the Father to those who are burdened and wounded.

Perhaps this sounds like a daunting and overwhelming task, too much to expect of any ordinary man. Of course it is, and it would be for any one of us. But you are not alone. Jesus sends to you his

Spirit, who will fill you with his gifts and enable you to act in his person, *in persona Christi*. Tomorrow you will celebrate your Masses of Thanksgiving on the great Solemnity of Pentecost, and we will remember once again the outpouring of the Spirit upon his Church. Before the coming of the Spirit, the apostles were tentative, timid, and unsure, but with the coming of the Spirit, they became fearless heralds of the Gospel, instruments of Christ's redeeming grace in the world. That same Spirit comes now to you, and forms you in the image and likeness of Jesus. In the Spirit you are sent forth to proclaim the Gospel, to celebrate the sacraments, and to shepherd God's people. The Spirit, whom Jesus breathed upon his apostles, will renew the face of the earth through you, one soul at a time, bringing joy and peace to all who seek him.

And finally, my brothers, do not forget the one who was closest to Jesus, his mother Mary. Let her be your mother too, for she will see in you the image of her Son, and she will love you as a mother loves her son. Just as Mary visited the shepherd children of Fatima, so now she will come to you and hold you close to her Immaculate Heart, which is forever united to the heart of Christ. My dear friends, let us all pray that our mother Mary will watch over our new priests. And may she help many more young men to hear the voice of Jesus, calling them to the holy priesthood of her beloved Son.