

Ordination of Priests

If you trace back four generations on both sides of my family, you find that I am one of quite a number of priests and nuns. My dad's cousin's son was a Jesuit in the southern province. On my mom's side, my grandmother had two brothers who became priests, one of them Vicar General for the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota. The other, a pastor, vested me at my ordination. The two of them had an older cousin and four nephews who were all priests, one of whom left the ministry and married a woman who was then killed by a bus. The same grandmother had a sister who became a nun, as did four of their nieces. My mom's sister is the last living member of her generation, Margareta Bertrand. She is a School Sister of Notre Dame in Mankato, Minnesota, and she will turn 100 years old in August. Two of my cousins are sisters in the same community, one a missionary in Guatemala, and the other a former head of the national office for religious vocations. My younger brother Tom was ordained a priest for our diocese but left the ministry after about ten years. So it's Fran, Rudy, Joe, William, Leo, Urban, Ray, Otto, Mary Ann, Auremunda, Ursella, Florence (formerly Paraclete), Mary Clare, Margareta, Mary, Cathy, Tom and me. That's 18 priests and nuns over four generations in my family.

There was almost one more on my dad's side. His maternal grandfather, Clement Joseph Buckman, was born in 1850 in Effingham, Illinois, and baptized the same day, the last of nine children in his family. Clement became a bookbinder, but he felt early on that God was perhaps calling him to the priesthood. So he entered a nearby seminary called Mount Saint Mary's of the West, perhaps you've heard of it. According to his great-granddaughter, through a sister of my grandmother, he left the seminary in Cincinnati because he disagreed with some things about the faith, and moved to New Orleans so as not to embarrass the family. He drifted from the church and joined the Masons, but on his death bed at age 46 he got up twice to confess his sins to the local priest. This so impressed his Presbyterian wife Carrie, that she became a Catholic, raised her children, including my grandmother, Catholic, and started going to daily mass. I was born in New Orleans, but if my great-grandfather had continued his studies in the seminary in Cincinnati, I wouldn't be here today. Or if I were, there'd be a different family story for me to tell.

Here's what the introduction to the Ordination of Priests says about the participants in the preparation and celebration: "103 It is the duty of all the faithful of the diocese to assist the candidates for the Priesthood by their prayers. This duty is fulfilled principally in the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) at Mass and in the intercessions of Vespers."

I've been limiting myself in these presentations to the paragraphs pertaining to priests, but I'm sharing with you this reference to all the faithful because of its unusual take on what is expected of people in the diocese - not recruitment, but prayer. Two specific types of prayer are mentioned, both of them liturgical. The first is quite logical. The Universal Prayer or prayer of the faithful at mass presents the petitions of the local community. Even though these are often copied and pasted from other sites of origin, they are meant to address the concerns of the parish. As you may recall, prior to the Second Vatican Council,

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the mass did not include the prayer of the faithful. There are antecedents for it in the middle ages, but it had long fallen into disuse. Because of the Council's call for the full, conscious, active participation of the people based on their baptized membership in the royal priesthood, the reintroduction of the Universal Prayer at mass carried an explanation - something most unusual in rubrics. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal states that in the Universal Prayer the people "exercise the office of their baptismal Priesthood." Just as ordained priests are expected to lead the presidential prayers at mass, so the royal priesthood offers its prayers at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. The introduction to the ordination of priests, then, asks the priestly people to exercise their common priesthood by praying for those to be ordained priests for them.

The second liturgical prayer surprises because so few lay people in the diocese pray vespers or reflect on the peculiar nature of its intercessions. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours says morning prayer includes "petitions for the consecration of the day and its work to God," and evening prayer has "intercessions" (52). The distinction is subtle and probably lost even on most priests who pray the Liturgy of the Hours every day, but the petitions at morning prayer are introspective, asking God's help for the day that lies ahead, while the intercessions at evening prayer more closely resemble the prayer of the faithful at mass, praying more broadly for the needs of the church and the world. When the Vatican revised the Liturgy of the Hours after the Council, it envisioned that lay people would be praying it as well. The practice has increased of late because electronic apps have made the four-volume set of books as portable as a cellphone, and the automatic updates for the prayers of the day have freed the average Catholic from studiously obtaining the arcane knowledge of ribbon placement. The introduction to the Ordination of Priests imagines that vespers has taken root strongly throughout the diocese, and that its celebration includes not just prayers by priests, but prayers for priests.

Promising faithfulness to the Liturgy of the Hours is part of the ordination ceremony. Many priests have struggled with this, and almost every priest either adjusts, reduces or expands his private prayer. Much of this is anticipated in the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours. Still, we priests probably need to scrutinize our daily prayer from time to time, realizing that the Liturgy of the Hours remains the primary vehicle for prayer outside the eucharist, and that the shortcuts we take may be justified by other pastoral responsibilities. However, shortcuts should not be made lightly, lest they so starve us for prayer that they place our spiritual life in peril.

The introduction continues: "104 Since a Priest is constituted for the sake of the entire local Church, the clergy and other faithful are to be invited to his Ordination, so that as many as possible may take part in the celebration. All the Priests of the diocese especially are to be invited to the celebration of an Ordination."

Speaking recently with the music director of one diocese, the subject of ordination liturgies came up. The director had been told by his diocesan supervisor that when planning music for the ordination, he should avoid much of

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the music familiar in parishes and limit the selections to the style and repertoire that was more common in seminaries, so that the seminarians at the ordination would feel at home. Ordinations are not about seminarians. They are about the diocesan church. The introduction envisions that as many as possible - clergy and other faithful - take part in the celebration. As for us priests, we are especially invited. One of my classmates complained recently that for several years he had not received in the mail an invitation to an ordination. When we were in the seminary, he said, we were told to send invitations to every priest of the diocese. I admit that that would be a courtesy today, but a priest should know that he's invited to an ordination even without an invitation. And if he's not friends with seminarians on Facebook, he may have missed reading the invitation that has already gone public.

The introduction continues, "105 The minister of sacred Ordination is a Bishop. It is fitting that the Diocesan Bishop be the minister of the Ordination of a Deacon to the Priesthood. Priests present at the celebration of an Ordination, however, lay hands on the candidates together with the Bishop, 'because of the common spirit they share as Priests.'" That final phrase is in quotation marks because it comes from the fourth-century *Apostolic Tradition*, the same source that gives us the foundations for Eucharistic Prayer II and the RCIA.

Because of our ordination into a presbyterate sharing ministry under a bishop, it is fitting that the diocesan bishop ordain. Notice the invitation for priests to lay hands on the candidates together with the bishop. The bishop is the one in charge, but we share priesthood with him, and our unified priestly ministry with the bishop is expressed in handlaying upon the new priests. When I impose hands on the newly ordained, I take a deep breath and blow gently onto the candidate's head as well. It's not in the rubrics.

Most priests immediately establish a certain camaraderie, and as with any family, there are some with whom we get along well and others with whom we don't. But we are family, and there's no taking that away. This focuses our identity and our hope, especially if the diocese ever feels polarized. Some priests become reclusive, making no effort to expand their associations with other priests. They think that they can get along fine without sustained contact with other priests of the diocese, but they probably cannot. Isolation from other priests cripples the vocation of a priest. It takes effort to be present to the rest of the presbyterate, but each of us needs that contact to establish the context of our vocation, and other priests need to see each of us to reaffirm their vocation. As with any sacrifice, we will find that the time and effort we give it brings unpredictable rewards.

Stereotypically, much of the polarization among priests today is said to split across generational boundaries. It isn't always true, but to some degree it is and always has been. To deepen unity in a presbyterate, it is particularly important for older priests to extend social invitations to younger priests; it is generally harder for it to work the other way around. The same applies to priests born in other nations; we American-born clergy probably have more responsibility in bridging those relationships than they do. The least we priests

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can do is to show up for ordinations, impose hands on the new priests of our diocese, share with them the spirit that has so generously been given to us, and pray for their future ministry.

I enjoy playing classical music. I own a pipe organ, two pianos and a harpsichord, and I love to practice. Once in a while I get the privilege of playing chamber music with some members of the Kansas City Symphony with whom I've become friends. They always make me sound better than I am, and when we play, nobody has more fun than I do. I recently played harpsichord at a friend's wedding, right after I had returned from a short trip to Rome. Because these events happened in the same week, I posted two photos together on Facebook, one showing Pope Francis at the Wednesday audience, and the other showing me at the harpsichord with the symphony's flutist, Michael Gordon. Michael is a bit of a rock star among classical musicians at home, so this was a thrill for me to play with him. When I posted both these photos, one of the pope and one of the flutist, Michael, who is a beer and barbecue kind of guy, replied to the online post. He wrote, "I can confidently say I've never before appeared in a Facebook post with the pope. It's a special day for a Jew."

I tell this story because musicians have a certain camaraderie too. Gatorade used to have a slogan, "Is it in you?" That's a question I find myself ruminating when I meet other people who may be musicians. "Is it in you?" Musicians have something that isn't in everyone else. Not everyone understands what musicians think and feel. Unquestionably, this is true of us priests. God has given us a spirit, a vocation, and a life experience that has limited our pool of peers. When we meet a potential seminarian, we're wondering, "Is it in you?" When we are with one another, we celebrate what is in us. We owe it to one another to foster that spirit in sacrifice and charity.

The introduction continues, "106 During the celebration of Ordination, one of the Bishop's assistants who were assigned to the formation of the candidates requests, in the name of the Church, the conferral of Ordination, and he replies to the Bishop's question on the worthiness of the candidates. Some of the Priests assist in vesting the newly ordained Priests. Insofar as possible, the Priests who are present greet their newly ordained brothers with the fraternal kiss as a sign of reception into the presbyterate and, along with the Bishop and the newly ordained Priests, concelebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist."

Near the end of this quote you see the expectation that we share the fraternal kiss, which signifies reception into the presbyterate. When the bishop does this, he says to the newly ordained, "Peace be with you," but there is no text governing what the rest of us are supposed to say. I often say, "Peace," but it is totally appropriate to say, "Welcome to our presbyterate." It would be even better if we followed up on that after the ordination with words and gestures that demonstrate the sincerity of that welcome - even if you didn't get a printed invitation.

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The end of this paragraph also indicates that the priests who are present concelebrate the liturgy of the eucharist. Some priests prefer to assist in choir dress, but the introduction envisions something else.

Finally, I'd like to cite a paragraph from the General Introduction to the rites of ordination. As you know there are three ordination rites - for bishops, priests and deacons. Just as we have two baptismal rites - for adults and for children - and one general introduction that covers both of those rites, so we have one general introduction for the three ordination rites as well.

Here's an excerpt from General Introduction, paragraph 4: "Even though Priests do not possess the fullness of the High Priesthood and in the exercise of their power are dependent on the Bishops, they are nevertheless linked to the Bishops in priestly dignity. By virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, in the image of Christ the eternal High Priest, they are consecrated to preach the Gospel, to shepherd the faithful, and to celebrate divine worship as true Priests of the New Testament." That entire paragraph is a quote from *Lumen gentium* 28.

Many of the quotes from these introductions show the interplay of bishop and priests. The observations are theologically sound. To some priests, though, they probably seem overmuch. After all, the people who approved these introductions were bishops. But members of the group who drafted them were not; they were theologians. We priests probably need a dose of this humility from time to time. The director of a social service agency in our neighborhood spoke to me recently about his conversation with one of the young priests of the diocese. The director said of the priest, "He's good, but at times he seems overbearing and self-centered." I said, "He's a priest." We all become managers of our worlds, and we think of ourselves as independent of other authority. Many pastors circumvent diocesan guidelines and chancery directives simply because we think we can do it a better way. We mean no harm. We make changes to our churches and to our liturgies that we think will last in perpetuity. They won't. They're going to last as long as it takes for the next guy to become pastor after we leave. Often when we do things our way, we don't help our people, who are going to have to do things some other priest's way after we leave. This makes people believe that the governing principle of parish life is "whatever Father wants." They don't know diocesan directives and universal church law, so they take the path of least resistance: whatever Father wants. This does not serve the church.

We are ordained in the image of Christ the eternal High Priest. As you can see in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal 95, the duties of priests - even of the priesthood of the faithful - are twofold: to give thanks and to offer sacrifice. With Christ we are expected to give God thanks for our lives. With Christ we are to offer ourselves in sacrifice. We are not called to pray for increased wages or more comfortable living quarters, to wield authority or expect adulation. You want to imitate Christ the eternal high priest? You are called to thankfulness and sacrifice.

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Back on General introduction 4, we are consecrated to preach the gospel. We do this by the way we live and by every conversation we have with people. They will know through our values whether or not we are living by the gospel. But most importantly, we preach the gospel in the homily. Many of us repeat homilies at weddings and funerals, baptisms and quinceañeras. Even on Sundays, we fall into a rut. But every occasion we have to preach deserves careful preparation and conscious proclamation. Liturgist and composer Lucien Deiss told a story of seeing a church ambo where a line from John's gospel was inscribed - not on the front for the people to see, but on top where the priest could read it. The verse comes from John 12:21, when the Greeks approach Philip and ask him a favor. "Sir, we want to see Jesus." On the ambo, it looks as if those words are coming from the congregation and are addressed to the preacher: "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Revealing Jesus is our task.

We are called to shepherd the faithful. We give people guidance by our example and our advice. They need us to guide their steps in this wayward society.

We are also to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament. That is last, but it really is first. When we stand at the altar, especially at the eucharistic prayer, we give God thanks, and we offer the sacrifices of our people to the Father.

There are two lines from the first eucharistic prayer that should remind us of the sacred ground on which we stand at every mass. The sanctuary may look like ordinary, comfortable space to you, but it's something more. In both examples the lines pertain to the presence or absence of the word "this". Only in Eucharistic Prayer I, after the consecration of the bread, does the priest use the word "this" when he picks up the chalice: We say of Jesus, "he took this precious chalice." Not "he took the chalice," but "he took this chalice." The contents of this chalice are the same contents of the chalice at the Last Supper. We are not simply recalling the Last Supper; we are there. After the memorial acclamation, when the priest bows down, he prays humbly that "these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing." It's not "through the participation of this altar," but "through this participation at the altar." Which altar? There's only one altar: the altar on high. The angel is taking the gifts there, and we are participating there at the one altar.

Both those are examples of precise translations of lines involving the word "this," but there is another example where an imprecise translation inserted the word "this" where it does not belong. During the preparation of the gifts, after we invite people to pray that our sacrifices will be acceptable, the people respond, "May the Lord accept this sacrifice at your hands." In Latin, the word "this" is not there. The people are not praying that the Lord accept the bread and wine that sits within reach of the hands of the priest, but that the Lord accept all their sacrifice, and all of ours, all that we are and all that we suffer for the sake of the people we love.

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My brothers, we are called into a sacred ministry between heaven and earth. At times our ministry seems cluttered by the society around us, but every day we place ourselves where we belong, at that altar on high, so that we may minister more effectively to God's people. God has called us, and we pray that God is grateful for our service. But we are not there to be thanked. We are there to give thanks and to offer our lives in sacrifice, in imitation of our great high priest, shepherd and brother, Jesus Christ.