



Homily – Episcopal Ordination of Bishop-elect Oscar Cantú

June 2, 2008

St. Mark the Evangelist Church

The Most Rev. José H. Gomez, S.T.D.
Archbishop of San Antonio

Your Eminence, my brother bishops, priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers, seminarians; my dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

What a joyous occasion we celebrate in this holy Eucharist tonight!

The Word of God we've just heard sets before us the great identity and mission of the bishop in the Church. My dear brother, Father Oscar, these readings tell us what is about to take place in a few moments when you are ordained a bishop.

St. Paul explains it in our second reading this evening. Through the solemn laying-on of my hands, you will be sealed in a holy calling. *Una vocación santa*. He talks of kindling a fire. As the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in tongues of fire at the first Pentecost, so the Spirit will be given to you, making you a successor of those very apostles.

This is a moment of great significance in the life and history of our Lord's Church.

But it is also something very deeply personal. I'm sure my brother bishops here tonight share my experience—that our ordination to the episcopacy was a definitive moment in our lives. As I speak to you now, I am touched by moving memories of my ordination.

Dear Bishop-elect: We learned of your appointment by Pope Benedict just before he came to visit our country in April. And in God's plan, your episcopal ministry will always be connected in a filial way to this Pope and to his beautiful and challenging vision of the episcopal office.

Meeting and praying with the bishops during his visit, the Holy Father reminded us that our mission as bishops is to promote the encounter with the living God. To fight against all the obstacles in our culture that discourage or prevent this encounter. And to help establish and nurture people in their relationship with Jesus Christ, who has revealed the face of the Father to us.

This becomes your mission now too my brother. It is the mission first given to the apostles, as again we hear in the Scriptures this evening. Through my hands, the Holy Spirit will anoint you Preacher, Apostle, and Teacher. *Mensajero, Apóstol y Maestro*.

You will be anointed a *Preacher* of good tidings to the afflicted. That means bringing the Word of God to those who don't yet know him or who have fallen away from him. Pope Benedict said we must remind people of the ultimate purpose of their lives. That a life without God is no life at all.

You will be anointed an *Apostle*, which means one who is sent. Sent to heal the brokenhearted with the oil of gladness—the sacraments of the faith by which we join God's family as beloved sons and daughters. Everyone is thirsting for God, Benedict tells us. And as bishops we must lead them to drink from the wells of his infinite love.

You will be anointed a *Teacher*. To proclaim the way of truth and freedom to those who are prisoners of lies and sin. To those who are captive to the false promises of a culture of materialism, secularism, and individualism. The bishop must open people's hearts and minds to the saving truths of the Gospel, Benedict again tells us. He must make Christ's teaching be heard clearly and forcefully. Especially on the most pressing issues of our day—those related to the sanctity of human life and the future of the family.

Mensajero y Apóstol y Maestro. This is our holy calling, my brother. Are we worthy of it? Hardly. How could anyone be? And yet still he calls us. Still he promises us the grace and strength we need to follow him.

As he called Peter on the seashore at Tiberias centuries ago, he calls to you tonight here in this church in San Antonio. Jesus is saying to you: "Oscar, son of Ramiro and María de Jesús, Do you love me more than these?" *¿Me amas más que éstos?*

You have already answered yes to this question when you were ordained a priest. But our Lord knows all things, and tonight he calls you to a deeper love. To a deeper identification with him in his identity and mission as the Good Shepherd.

"Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep." Tonight he entrusts you with his little flock. This is a very important point. It is not your flock. But his. *My* sheep, he says to you. The love you are called to is a selfless love. A sacrificial love. A love that seeks not its own, but rather the glory of God's name and his kingdom.

Take courage, my brother! You must answer our Lord's call with Christian valor. You are not being given a spirit of fear or timidity. You will receive a spirit of power and love. The power and strength of God. *La fuerza de Dios*. This is the flame, the gift of God, you must keep. And what is this power, my brother? It is the power of the cross.

As Paul tells us this evening, Christ by his cross has destroyed death. God's love is stronger than death! For this good news, this gospel, you are being anointed *Mensajero y Apóstol y Maestro*. And this great truth should make you bold in your preaching and teaching, and fearless in your ministry as his apostle.

Like the apostles in whose footsteps you will now walk, do not be ashamed to imitate Christ—being willing to suffer, even to lay down your life for the sake of your flock and his gospel.

I welcome you my brother in the service of this great and historic Archdiocese!

Know that you walk in the footsteps of some very holy bishops. Men like St. Rafael Guizar y Valencia, the first American-born bishop to be canonized, and our good friend, Archbishop Flores. May we be worthy of such holy predecessors!

In close friendship and collaboration with our brother priests, let us together be bishops as our Holy Father urges us to be bishops—“With Christ-like generosity . . . living a Christ-centered life, cultivating the virtues, and immersing ourselves in prayer.”

These are my prayers for you who will soon be Bishop Oscar Cantú. I entrust you and your episcopal ministry to the Queen of Apostles, Our Lady of Guadalupe.