



Homily – Ordination of New Priests for the Archdiocese of San Antonio

May 17, 2008
San Fernando Cathedral

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

My brother bishops and fellow priests, Deacon Steven and Deacon Alex, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

The readings we've just heard speak to us all about our own special place in the Body of Christ. We have all been anointed in baptism and called to love and to bring the good news of God to our brothers and sisters. As Paul tells us in our second reading: Each of us, no matter who we are or what we're called to do, must use the gifts and graces we've received to serve our Lord in love and with joy.

But in a special way, our Lord is speaking to you today, my dear deacons who are about to become priests. He asks: "Do you love me more than these?" *¿Me amas más que éstos?* He speaks these words to Peter. But he speaks them to you, too. You who are about to enter in a deep and permanent way into the apostolic ministry of Peter and the apostles.

My brothers, in this sacrament you are about to receive, you will give the same answer that Peter gave on that cold morning by the sea in the days after the first Easter: "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you."

My brothers, you love the Lord *more than these*. *Más que éstos*. More than all the material satisfactions our culture has to offer. With open hearts and with great generosity of spirit, you have freely decided to leave home and family to follow Jesus. To live only for his sake and the sake of his Gospel.

Each of us is called in faith to serve the Lord. But only a few are called to be his holy priests. To be fathers of God's people! To be shepherds of his flock! Sharers in the priesthood of Jesus Christ!

The prophet today in the first reading also speaks of your priesthood.

You will be anointed to preach the good news of freedom to those held captive in many ways, spiritually and materially. To heal the brokenhearted in the sacraments of mercy, especially Penance and Reconciliation.

All this Jesus intends when he tells you today: "Feed my sheep." *Apacienta mis corderos*.

Our Lord calls you in a special way to feed God's people with the Word of life and the Bread of life. With the Gospel and the Holy Eucharist. My brothers! Can there be any greater mission than to share in God's plan for his family, for the growth of his kingdom on earth?

Tomorrow we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity—the core mystery of our religion. My dear deacons, I pray that you see your priesthood in light of that great mystery, which is *a mystery of divine love*. The mystery of God who so loved the world that he came among us to know our joys, temptations, and sorrows.

In the mystery of God's plan, he never reveals himself to us directly. He always comes to us through the words and actions of other people. He spoke through Abraham and Moses, David and the prophets. Through their faith, through their following of the Lord, Israel and the world came to know the true and living God.

It is the same way now in the "new Israel," the Church. Jesus Christ told his apostles to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. To baptize. To celebrate the Eucharist in memory of his sacrifice on the cross.

Dear brothers: Through these means, through the Word that you preach and the sacraments you celebrate, the people of the world will come in contact with the true and living God.

This is the mystery of your ministry *in persona Christi*. Who hears you hears him. Who sees you will know the Father. You alone have the power to speak in his name—to grant his forgiveness, to feed his lambs with his Body and Blood.

Again, my brothers, I ask: Can there be any greater privilege and responsibility than to share in our Lord's own priesthood?

For this brothers, you will need courage. The virtue of fortitude. To my mind, this virtue is the most important thing in the life of the priest today. Fortitude comes from Christ who told us: "Fear not." Our courage comes from knowing that Christ has overcome the world. That by his resurrection the one thing we fear above all else—death—has been destroyed.

My brothers, faith in his resurrection should make you bold in proclaiming his gospel without compromise, without fear. Faith in his resurrection should give you the courage to persevere in love. To withstand temptations. To endure obstacles and hardships in your ministry. To struggle against your weaknesses. To become holy in imitation of Christ.

I heard a great story of priestly courage recently. There is a new book out, the diary kept by a priest during his time in the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau, Poland. Father Jean Bernard's diary is a very simple record of what went on in the camp. Not only of the savage cruelty.

What stands out to me is the fortitude of these priests. They prayed and sang hymns while forced to perform brutal manual labor. They talked to each other and their captors about God and Jesus. Even though the guards would beat them and tell them their faith was all "nonsense and lies." They celebrated the Mass in secret. In fact, they lived for the Eucharist. They would risk death rather than be without it.

And they offered up their sufferings for peace and justice, for reconciliation, for the salvation of the world. Father Jean said that the act of faith "gives meaning to our suffering, lifts it above the

purely human and joins our small personal suffering to the sea of injury and persecution that the Church of Christ endures and must endure.”

My brothers, I pray that you cultivate such a virtue of fortitude. That you may know the feeling that St. Paul expressed: “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” *Todo lo puedo en Aquel que me conforta.* (Phil. 4:13)

Stay close to the Lord in love my brothers. Say to him every day: “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Make the disciplines of the priestly life your daily pathway in holiness. Seek the face of Jesus in your prayer, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Rosary. Adore him and listen to him in the Blessed Sacrament. And most especially, unite yourself to him in your daily offering of the Holy Mass.

And all of us, my dear brothers and sisters: We must pledge ourselves to pray for these men. That they may lead many to Jesus and more of their brothers to the holy priesthood.

I ask these things in the name of our Lady of Guadalupe, the Mother of Priests.