

On this past Good Shepherd Sunday Pope Francis ordained nine men to the priesthood for the Diocese of Rome. During the homily the pope said: “You will be shepherds like him. This is what he wants of you. Pastors. Pastors of God’s holy faithful people. Pastors who go with God’s people: sometimes in front of the flock, sometimes in the middle or behind, but always there with God’s people.”

Always there with the people. My brothers to be ordained for San Antonio today, that is your mandate. Always be there with the people. Don’t be afraid to get your shoes muddy with the earth of our archdiocese and our people. Never forget that this is what you are ordained to do, to be among the people, especially the most vulnerable, listening to them, sharing in their joys and their sorrows, being a part of their lives and serving them as Christ showed us.

The call of a diocesan priest is to be a person who is close. The pope urged the new priests to seek “closeness” to God, their bishop, their fellow priests, and the People of God throughout their priestly service. He described this as the “four closeness’s of the priest.” What a beautiful reminder of how we must live our priesthood! All of us priests who gather with the two of you, soon to be our brothers in the ministry, should ask ourselves today how we have been living these closeness’s.

Our closeness to God comes with daily prayer, Eucharist and preaching, which must take a priority in our lives. Our closeness with the bishop is shown in respect and collaboration, as we gather

around him to serve our people. Our closeness to our brother priests comes in fraternity, as we support and care for each other. Our closeness to the people comes in humility, service and identification with them, especially the poorest. The Holy Father reminds us and urges us to live the call and practice closeness every day.

The gospel today tells us that God's love is shown best by Jesus' love for his disciples. It is about friends who lay down their lives for each other. With Jesus, the heart of friendship is partnership in accepting the cross. Today, my brothers about to be ordained, is the moment you are partnering with Jesus in a deeper way and accepting the cross. There will be times when your cross will be very difficult. On those days remember your closeness to God. Also, remember there are many of us, your brothers in the priesthood, as well as the laity, who want to help you carry that cross.

All who love Jesus will remain with each other. This means what we ask of God in Jesus' name we get, namely joy in perfect fulfilling of God's will. This is the joy of living the gospel. It manifests itself in many ways, especially by a constant smile to all and a great sense of humor. These lift up people we meet. To offer a positive and happy life for others is the ultimate act of a Christian. It certainly is the life of the priest. Be a happy priest! Share the joy!

Jesus says in the gospel we "remain" in his love. Our response must be "Thank you." Love is rooted in action. Thanksgiving results in generous action, namely the giving back and offering of one's life for others. The priest does that best when he is willing to listen to the people, enter into their experiences and walk with them in

accompaniment. Your preaching and teaching come for this attitude of a listening heart.

To abide with Jesus is to find meaning in the friendship Jesus speaks about today, friendship of trust, knowledge, love and unity. The disciples are called to that even as Jesus returns to the Father. Always continue to grow your friendship with Jesus throughout your life as a priest.

In this gospel John uses the word “love” eight times in eight verses. For First Century Mediterranean people love was not an emotion, but an attachment to a group. A few weeks ago we saw the attachment of vine and branches that expresses this. Love as attachment means God is so attached to human beings that He sent the Son, since the Son is so attached to the Father. This is the deep relationship with God you are called to pursue. Attachment! Jesus called disciples to do the love, put it in actions. This love is to be FOR the other, to ACT for the other, even at the cost to oneself. Today is a day you attach yourself to Jesus and the Church in a new and profound way.

When love is given to us, it implies a responsibility as well. It must be shared. The ultimate showing of love by Jesus was to carry the cross and give his life. The willingness to offer your life is central to the paschal mystery. It will involve suffering, but suffering is the classroom in which one learns obedience to God. The gospel today points us in that direction.

Finally, Pope Francis at this year’s Mass of Chrism spoke to the priests assembled of the grace of amazement. Jesus’ relationship with the people was marked by *the grace of amazement*: the

amazement of the people who saw Jesus, listened to his teaching with authority and felt his compassionate presence. Jesus himself also expressed amazement at the faith of the people. Jesus took the time to listen to people and to understand their petitions and their faith and in doing so he was amazed by what he experienced in them.

There is a crucifix of the Cristo Negro in the back of San Fernando Cathedral close to the main doors. It is a special place where mostly the poor go to leave milagros, notes of petition, hospital wrist bands and even locks of hair. To observe them as they interact with the Cristo Negro is to allow yourself to be amazed by their faith. They enter as if carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders and after leaving their petition or recuerdo and interacting fervently with Jesus, they leave a little bit stronger and standing a little bit straighter, once again with the grace to face their lives. There are moments like that in every parish with our people. Certainly, we have seen amazing acts of faith during this time of Covid, as so many people of God worked so hard to care for others. Allow yourself throughout your priesthood to be amazed by the faith of your people and pray to have that kind of faith for yourself.

It is with much joy that the Church of San Antonio calls you today to be priests and surrounds you in prayerful support. May the God of joy y nuestra Madre de Guadalupe accompany you every day of your ministry!