

Saturday, June 10, 2017

Ordination Mass – James Puglis, TOR and Jason Wooleyhan, TOR  
Mount Assisi Friary Chapel

There is a story of a young man who accidentally overturned his wagonload of corn in the road. The farmer who lived nearby came by to investigate.

He called out to the young man, "Hey, Willis, that sure is quite a burden you have there. Forget your troubles for a while and come on in and have dinner with us. Then I'll help you get the wagon up."

Willis answered, "That's mighty nice of you, but I don't think Pa would like me to do that."

The farmer insisted and finally Willis said, "OK. But my Pa won't like it."

After a typical farmer's mid-day meal, including homemade apple pie, Willis thanked his neighbors for their hospitality.

As they headed for the door, Willis said to the farmer, "I feel better now, but I just know Pa is going to be real upset."

The farmer looked at Willis with a big smile and said, "By the way, where is your Pa?"

"Under the wagon."

I thought of that story because the readings from the Sacred Scriptures are full of thoughts and feelings like the burdens and distress experienced by Moses in the Book of Numbers.

The opening line reveals that Moses had the same feeling as Willis; that the Father is not too happy with things. Moses and Willis had the misfortune of suffering from problems that they did not create.

What made it worse is that both Moses and Willis felt they had a duty to respond, even though the problem seemed overwhelming.

In the Gospel reading, St. Matthew reminds us that during his earthly ministry, Jesus was aware of the burdens, the challenges, and the sufferings of his people.

It says that he took pity on them because they were troubled and felt like they were abandoned.

Certainly poor Willis' father felt abandoned when his son decided to have dinner before coming to his rescue.

But the Lord Jesus also had in mind the disciples who were in training to be the ones who would be responsible for the care of that vast flock who were like sheep without a shepherd.

He acknowledged that the laborers are few, but with confidence he reassured everyone that additional help is available. But it is up to all of us, members of his flock, to ask the master of the harvest to send more to help.

I am sure that all of us here have done that, and this Ordination Mass is a sign that God hears and responds to our prayers.

Now, our brothers, James and Jason, are about to respond, not simply in this Ordination Mass, but in the way they live their response for the rest of their lives.

It says in the Rite of Ordination that the paradigm for the ministry and life of a priest is to serve Christ the Teacher, the Priest, and the Shepherd by whose ministry the Lord's Body, the Church, is built up and grows into the People of God, a holy temple.

James and Jason, you know that the sacred duty of preaching and teaching in the name of Christ comes first.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis explains that as priests you are to impart to everyone the word of God that you have received with joy.

Pope Francis borrows the following words of Pope Paul VI who wrote:

“Let us deepen our enthusiasm at the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing. And may the world of our time which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, impatient, or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, n. 80).

In order to be that joyful minister of the word of God, the Rite of Ordination has some important practical advice: “Meditating on the law of the Lord, see that you believe what you read, that you teach what you believe, and that you practice what you teach.”

The most difficult part of that advice for any of us is to practice what we teach.

Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel* that this demands generosity on our part, but it is never a heroic, individual undertaking. It is first and foremost the initiative and work of the Lord Jesus.

Pope Francis reminds us that the first initiative is that God loves us first, and that God provides the growth; for you and for the people to whom you announce the word of God.

Pope Francis says, always remember, that while God asks everything of you, at the same time God offers everything to you and to all of us.

This leads to the second dimension of the ministry you will exercise in Christ. It is the office of sanctifying. At the altar, the spiritual sacrifice of all the faithful is united to the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

In the *Rite of Ordination*, the Church urges you to understand what you do and imitate what you celebrate as a priest at the altar.

James and Jason, you know that sacramental celebration should not be mechanical or theatrical.

It should prayerfully express that you enter into the mystery that you are celebrating, and you are helping others to enter the saving mystery of the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

As Pope Francis says in *The Joy of the Gospel*, this involves helping believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God's love.

It involves helping them experience conversion which restores the joy of faith to their hearts and inspires a renewed commitment to the Gospel.

The third dimension of sacred ministry that you will exercise is in imitation of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd; the one who laid down his life for his sheep.

By now you have heard the often repeated words of Pope Francis that a shepherd must smell like his sheep, and that can only happen when we are out there with them.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis observes that God's people are typically encountered in the parish setting. But the parish is not just the people who enter the church on Sunday morning for Mass.

Borrowing from the teaching of St. John Paul II, Pope Francis explains that a parish is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.

It presumes that the Church's ministers are in contact with the homes and lives of the people.

In the words of Pope Francis, these domestic parishes, where each of you will exercise ministry as a shepherd, are environments for hearing God's word, for growth in Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, celebration, and healing, and so much more.

So James and Jason, what can you expect when you get out there?

I heard a story about a young salesman who was disappointed about losing a big sale. He told his sales manager, "I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink."

The manager replied, "Your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty."

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis acknowledges that people in our world are hungry and thirsty and full of so many needs and desires.

Among those desires is the truth; about God and about themselves. Trying to satisfy that hunger and thirst can be a challenge.

Pope Francis suggests and even urges that the message that you bring by your words, by your life, and by your ministry, should concentrate on what is most beautiful, appealing, and necessary.

What you bring by your words, by your life, and by your ministry must be done generously and courageously; without inhibition or fear.

And remember that what you do starting today is never done alone. As ordained priests of Christ's Church, you are never alone. Your ministry is exercised in communion with other deacons, priests and bishops.

And as members of the Third Order Regular, your priestly ministry is exercised in communion with your brothers and your religious superior.

In that communion, you are to go forth as missionaries who learn not to rely only on your own abilities and gifts. Exaggerated self-reliance is one of the causes for our wagons to turn over as we make our journey.

Remember what was pointed out to Moses in the first reading. The Lord God does not expect us to do it all ourselves.

All of us together must assist one another in the life and ministry that we share.

And, as Pope Francis recommends, do not forget to seek the assistance of those you are sent to serve.

The people of God are looking forward to what you will bring to them as their priest. And they are already grateful for who you are and what you are to become in this ordination to the priesthood.

Allow the people of God to be signs of God's love and mercy toward you. Allow them to bless you, even in those moments when they seek your blessing; especially when they seek so much of your time and attention; when they ask you to help with the overturned wagons of their lives.

James and Jason, if you are ever discouraged by the demands that are placed on you, remember the words of St. Peter who greets you in the second reading "as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed."

St. Peter says:

"Tend the flock of God in your midst, overseeing not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it; not for shameful profit but eagerly."

"Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock."

"And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

So let me finish with these final thoughts from Pope Francis from *The Joy of the Gospel*. He says:

"To believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love means realizing that he confers upon them an infinite dignity."

"To believe that the Son of God assumed our human flesh means that every person has been taken up into the very heart of God."

“To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which enobles each human person.”

That includes you, James and Jason.

Thank you for believing.

Thank you for recognizing the gift of God’s love in your lives;

- a love that moved you to enter consecrated life as a Franciscan friar;
- a love that has called you to enter the order of the priesthood;
- a love that is shared in the example of the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve.

Poor Willis kept thinking about how his father would disapprove of his poor driving skills and his delay in turning the wagon upright.

Unfortunately, it prevented him from just thinking about his father.

James and Jason, your heavenly Father knows about your good intentions, and he knows about the overturned wagons in your lives. He knows all that and more about each one of us. Yet, it is his desire for you to be called this day to follow the way of his Son Jesus Christ, who is Priest, Prophet, and Shepherd.

Finally, in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis states that there is a “Marian style” to the Church’s work of evangelization.

Do not neglect the presence of the Mother of God in your life and ministry as a priest. In the concluding prayer to *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis prays to the Blessed Virgin Mary in these words:

“Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast; pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.”

What a great day this is for the Sacred Heart Province of the Third Order Regular. It is a great day for you, James and Jason, and for your families.

It is a day when the Mother of the Church is praying with us and for you who are to be ordained, so that all may rejoice in the joy of the Gospel through the sacred ministry you are about to receive.