



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis
Homily for the Ordination of Dom Linus Dolce to the Priesthood
June 11, 2010

Today is a great and joyous day for your own family, for the Abbey of St. Mary and St. Louis, for Abbot Thomas Frerking, for the community of monks here, and for the entire Archdiocese of St. Louis as you, Brother Linus, present yourself as a candidate for ordination to the priesthood.

In the Roman Pontifical Rites of Ordination for priests, we read:
“Beloved brothers and sisters: because these our sons, who are your relatives and friends, are now to be advanced to the Order of priests, consider carefully the nature of the rank in the Church to which they are about to be raised. It is true that God has made his entire holy people a royal priesthood in Christ. Nevertheless, our great Priest himself, Jesus Christ, chose certain disciples to carry out publically in his name, and on behalf of mankind, a priestly office in the Church. For Christ was sent by the Father and he in turn sent the Apostles into the world, so that through them and their successors, the Bishops, he might continue to exercise his office of Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd. Indeed, priests are established co-workers of the Order of Bishops, with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the people of God.

After mature deliberation, Brother Linus is now to be ordained to the priesthood in the Order of the presbyterate so as to serve Christ the Teacher, Priest, and Shepherd, by whose ministry his body, that is, the Church, is built and grows into the People of God, a holy temple.

In being configured to Christ the eternal High Priest and joined to the priesthood of the Bishops, he will be consecrated as a true priest of the New Testament, to preach the Gospel, to shepherd God’s people, and to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy, especially the Lord’s Sacrifice.”

We might well ask ourselves: “Just what does it mean to be configured to Christ the eternal High Priest? Pope Benedict XVI tells us that “in the administration of the sacraments, the priest now acts and speaks ‘*in persona Christi.*’ In the sacred mysteries, he does not represent himself and does not speak expressing himself, but speaks for the Other, for Christ.” In other words, the ordained priest will be acting in the person of Christ the head, “*in persona Christi capitis.*”

What is made visible sacramentally, (the priest acting in the person of Christ the head), **should also transpire inwardly and mystically** as the priest yields his inner being to Christ’s transforming grace. When the candidate for the priesthood comes forward for



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ordination, his first spoken words are “*Ad sum*” which means “I am present” or “I am ready,” or “I am here so that you may make use of me as you want.”

This conforming ourselves to the mind and heart of Christ is the key to a rich and fruitful priestly ministry. It means that the priest puts on Christ **inwardly** each and every day before he puts on his priestly vestments. Putting on Christ really means **begging Christ for the privilege of entering more deeply each day into his Passion and Death**. Embracing his Passion is so clearly and dearly needed if we are to embrace the hurts our egos have to suffer in order for our spirits to rejoice in a new-found freedom. United with Christ’s Passion, the ego’s suffering passes quickly and is superseded by a profound and lasting joy.

Christ did not cling to his Divinity but emptied himself, taking on the nature of a slave, becoming obedient even unto death, the death of a cross. “Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.”

This is an exciting life because allowing Christ to purify us through humility and repentance is making the one evangelized, the evangelizer. We cannot become an evangelizer, or an effective priest, unless we are unafraid. We are afraid of what is outside of us only because we are inwardly afraid of what reaction that external situation may trigger inside of us. In short, we are only afraid of what we may find inside of ourselves.

Yet the simple fact is that if we are ready to suffer with Christ on the cross, we will suffer the necessary inner purification which will render us unafraid of ourselves in any situation. Christ again and again told us: “Do not be afraid!” When we stay with Christ in the midst of our fears and of our inner poverty, we experience Christ purifying us. The fear which was so gigantic recedes and is replaced with peace, inner joy and freedom! The inner purification which Christ begets in us not only fills us with exquisite joy, but it also renders us transparent. **We become a living Gospel, because our actions translate the word of Christ into the person of Christ.** Then a priest, in a very profound way is acting “*in persona Christi capitis*.”

In addition to this, we are the good news to others **because the mercy we so readily received gives us confidence that what the Lord is doing in our hearts is exactly what He wants to do in the hearts of others.** We have this confidence and zeal because we already know inwardly from experience that what we have to offer others will bring them freedom, joy and peace. In fact, it fills us with empathy for sinners like ourselves. We know the issues we have faced and are facing, and ***we are experiencing*** the answer to these issues, and the answer is Christ, and that is the “What” and the “Whom” we wish to share with others. It is the Christ who first has to pierce our egos with His truth so that he can touch our hearts with His transforming and healing love and mercy. Living then



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becomes simply an exchange—an exchange of our sins for more of his mercy and love. That is how we put on Christ.

Pope John Paul II tells us that every day we “celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we say the words of consecration, Take and Eat, Take and Drink, *in persona Christi*, in order to make present on our altars the sacrifice made once and for all on Calvary.” (Pope John Paul II—Holy Thursday, 2005)

In his last letter to priests, written from Gemelli Hospital in Rome on March 13, 2005, Pope John Paul II tells us: “Christ’s self-giving, which as its origin in the Trinitarian life of the God who is Love, reaches its culmination in the sacrifice of the Cross, sacramentally anticipated in the Last Supper. It is impossible to repeat the words of consecration without *feeling oneself caught up in this spiritual movement*. In a certain sense, *when* he says the words: ‘take and eat,’ **the priest must learn to apply them also to himself, and to speak them with truth and generosity**. If he is able to offer himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need, (then) his life takes on its true meaning.

“This is exactly what Jesus expected of his apostles, as the Evangelist John emphasizes in his account of the washing of the feet. It is also what the People of God expect of a priest. If we think about it more fully, the priest’s promise of *obedience*, which he made on the day of Ordination . . . is illuminated by this relationship with the Eucharist. Obeying out of love, sacrificing even a certain legitimate freedom when the authoritative discernment of the Bishop so requires, the priest lives out in his own flesh that ‘take and eat’ with which Christ, in the Last Supper, gave himself to the Church.”

Pope John Paul demonstrated by his life of selfless service and by his embracing the cross, even the cross of suffering in the hospital, the real meaning of these words, “take and eat.”

So I say to you Linus, as a candidate for the priesthood, open your heart wide to the transforming grace of priestly ordination. Let the grace of this sacrament first transform your heart so that you can then be a witness of His transforming power flowing through you as you perform your priestly service.

This is not so much a call to a position of honor or respect as it is a call to humility, repentance, and generous service. I always feel that if God can use a klutz like me then anyone is fair game for his saving grace. That is the message of hope and mercy we bring as we offer ourselves as priests in the service of the Church. We are called to be other “Christs.” The reality of being another Christ is far greater than the image, but the reality brings the image alive and gives it flesh and bones, and makes Christ visible and believable. Our people are searching for the face and voice of Jesus. That is why you have offered yourself as a candidate for priestly ordination, and that is why the Church is calling you to this sacrament of Holy Orders. Ultimately it is Christ who is calling you. It



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is Christ who is ordaining you. It is Christ who is transforming you. It is Christ who is sending you. Yours is a call to be generous in your surrender to his transforming grace.

Pope Benedict, in the letter written just one year ago for the beginning of the Year of the Priest said: “Dear priests, Christ is counting on you. In the footsteps of the *Cure of Ars*, let yourselves be enthralled by him. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation, and peace!”

You are doing all of this as a devoted follower of Benedict. He established with his monasteries a Catholic culture which transformed Europe. May you, as a follower of St. Benedict, do all in your power, with the grace of God, to transform the culture in which we live. Your ‘yes’ to the priesthood of Jesus Christ, brings all of us so much hope. Amen.