

Homily of Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Ordination to Priesthood
June 9, 2018

Dear Matt, Juan Carlos and Dan,

Today the Church of Fall River rejoices with you, welcomes you into Priesthood, and celebrates with you and your family, as we give thanks to God for having called you and brought you to this day.

First, I hope you realize that **YOU ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE GOD CALLED YOU**. We heard in the first reading today the Lord telling Jeremiah, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.”*

Your Ordination today is a response to God, who chose you and called you for the service of his people. Following the example of Christ, you listened, said ‘Yes’ to God the Father, and accepted to do God’s will even with sacrifice just as St. Paul tells us Jesus did, as *“he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”*

As priests, you must first be obedient to God in all that you do; when you promise obedience to your Bishop here today, you are really promising to obey God’s plan and his will for you, which are manifested through the Bishop, as God representative for the good of God’s people in the local Church. An essential aspect to both hearing God and then doing God’s will is humility, for often God is speaking to us things we do not want to hear and telling us things we would rather not do.

God did not call you because you were perfect or even because you could become perfect, but because he saw enough goodness and generosity in the depths of your heart to make you his servant to shepherd his people.

And therefore He called you:

- To Preach the Gospel with joy
- To Celebrate the Sacraments – especially the Eucharist - with faith
- To Counsel and care for God’s people with love
- To be his apostle to bring God’s word to the world
- He called you to be Christ for the world

In proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord, which is your primary task as a priest, remember that you preach it more with your life than with your words.

Remember that you are being ordained, not for yourself, not for honor and privilege, but to the service of God and his people. As priest you are configured in Christ and are called to conform your life to the life of Christ.

You have been chosen from among God's people, now you are one **for** God's people. Priesthood is not, first and foremost, something we *do*, but *someone we are*.

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, St. John Paul II told us: "The priest must **be** a man of God, the one who belongs exclusively to God and inspires people to think of God. So, the priest must have a deep intimacy with Jesus."

And in order to be a man of God you must be a man of prayer, of meditation on God's word, of contemplation before God's wonderful deeds and his presence in the Mystery of the Eucharist, always keeping your eyes on Jesus. We do all for him and in memory of him.

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Pope Francis tells us: "Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord's presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness?"

We never have to pretend that we are perfect, that we have all the answers, or that we have it all under control. We are fellow sinners with God's people. We are journeying with them in faith. We need their prayers as they need ours. We need their faith as they need ours.

We heard in the Gospel today that, "Jesus **took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it ...**"

Perhaps this is precisely a paradigm of the priesthood itself: Jesus takes us, blesses us, *breaks* us, and *gives* us.

Taking and blessing we can live with! Breaking and giving? Well, that's another matter! Are you willing to allow Jesus to take you, bless you, break you and give you to his people so that you no longer belong to yourself but to the Church and to God's people?

We're not priests for what we can get, but for what we can *give*, and anyone who's in it for power, authority, privilege, or entitlement should not be.

Maybe we need to go back to the Church of the *Acts of the Apostles*, "Silver and gold I have not, but what I do have, I sure give you: In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk!"

God is the only treasure people desire to find in a priest— gold, clout, prestige, power, property, wealth -- we don't have! All we have is Jesus -- and that's the greatest treasure of all. That's what people want! And we can't give Him unless we have Him with us always.

We don't have to do extraordinary things to share Jesus with people. We can do it in the very ordinary things of life, when done in faith and love. Scholarly research has found that what people most want in their priest is a "hopeful, holy man who smiles."

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin once said, "The priest is the one who leads the people of God into an ever more intimate contact with Jesus Christ. It is in carrying out this sacred task that one is most authentically a priest. They don't want us to be politicians, business managers, or social workers. They want us to bring them into contact with the transcendent, with holiness."

Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận gives us Ten Simple Rules of Life:

- I will live the present moment to the fullest.
- I will discern between God and God's works.
- I will hold firmly to one secret: prayer.
- I will see in the Holy Eucharist my only power.
- I will have only one wisdom: the science of the Cross.
- I will remain faithful to my mission in the Church and for the Church as a witness of Jesus Christ.
- I will seek the peace the world cannot give.
- I will carry out a revolution by renewal in the Holy Spirit.
- I will speak one language and wear one uniform: Charity.
- I will have one very special love: The Blessed Virgin Mary

On this day we celebrate the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, may she protect you, guide you, defend you and keep you close to her Immaculate Heart and close to Sacred Heart of her Son, Jesus.