

I AM JOSEPH YOUR BROTHER

Homily for Evening Prayer

Presentation of Letter of Appointment as Seventh Archbishop of Chicago

Holy Name Cathedral

Feast of Saint Bartholomew

Tuesday, August 24, 1982 - 7:30 p.m.

I AM JOSEPH YOUR BROTHER

Archbishop Laghi, Brother Bishop, especially The Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, Bishop Hayes, Bishop Abramowicz, Father Keating, my dear brothers in Christ:

I. Peace be with You

Peace be with you. This is my first greeting to you, the priests who serve this local Church, the Archdiocese of Chicago. Peace be with you and all the parish communities you represent. Peace be with your families and friends. Tonight in all sincerity I embrace each of you in the peace of Christ. From the warm welcome you have given me, I already feel that the peace I offer rests upon you and that you embrace me in peace. The peace we share strengthens me as I begin my pastoral ministry among you.

When the bishop of a diocese dies the whole Church mourns and prays for his repose. When a new bishop is named the whole Church gives thanks and everyone opens his eyes and ears in curiosity about the new shepherd. But none mourn and pray more for their bishop in death, and rejoice more at the news of a new bishop, than the priests. Even as I speak you are

asking: "Who is he?" "What manner of man is Joseph Bernardin?" "What does he think of us?" "What is his vision of the priesthood?" "What are his plans?" "Is he the man of faith, prayer, and compassion that a diocese needs or is he a career bureaucrat rewarded for his loyalty?" And I, in turn, am full of questions about you. We all sense the excitement and feeling of challenge of this occasion.

II. What Am I Like?

Who am I? What am I like? I am a member of the class of 1952: I know Chicago has had some remarkable ordination classes. Your ranks extend from Father Martin Schmidt, ordained in 1910, to Father Jack Clair, the youngest member of the class of 1982. But I am told that the class which Cardinal Stritch ordained on May 1, 1952, is really extraordinary in terms of the leaders it produced.

Just a few days earlier, on April 26, I was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Charleston. I look forward to meeting my Chicago classmates and celebrating our thirty-first anniversary together. Called to be the new head of the presbyterate of Chicago, I am a new member of that class as well.

My father Joseph, who came to America from the Province of Trent in Northern Italy, was a stonecutter. Though he died when I was only six, I remember him. With the loss of my father, I became even closer to my dear mother, Maria, and my sister, Elaine. I was very blessed to grow up in a family full of love, faith, and a willingness to work hard.

I had long wanted to be a doctor, but in 1945 I decided instead to become a priest. I have very happy memories of the years I spent in Charleston after ordination and in Atlanta as pastor of Christ the King Cathedral parish. Two of the most influential priests in my life have been the late Archbishop Paul Hallinan, whom I served as chancellor in Charleston and later as Auxiliary Bishop of Atlanta, and Cardinal John Dearden, who was president of the bishops' conference when I was general secretary.

I have benefited greatly from my experiences as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, as a delegate to several Synods, and as a member of the Congregation for Bishops. But the greatest blessing in my priesthood were the ten years during which I was privileged to serve as Archbishop of Cincinnati. The loyal and dedicated priests, religious, and people of that gifted archdiocese have shaped my identity as a priest and bishop. If my labors here in Chicago are fruitful, it will be due in great measure to what I learned from the Church of Cincinnati.

The priests of Cincinnati were especially helpful to my spiritual growth. Several years ago, I sensed that administrative responsibilities were eating away at my interior life. I told several young priests that I felt they were praying more and better than I. I told them I wanted and needed their help. They generously took me into their lives of prayer and helped me come closer to the Lord. Theirs was a wonderful and permanent gift.

As to my personal tastes and habits, I am quite ordinary. I do like music. My favorite is classical, especially opera. I am credited with

being a good cook but that is somewhat exaggerated. One of the main difficulties in recent years has been the lack of time needed to develop whatever culinary skills I might have. Also, I do not want to regain the weight I lost several years ago. My friends say I am a workaholic, but I do not think I am. If I do work hard, it is more because I like what I do than because of compulsion. Yet I do not consider myself indispensable. I do take time for recreation and refreshment. At the end of the day I enjoy a brisk walk and an easy conversation with a fellow priest.

III. What Do I Think of You?

What do I think of you, the priests of Chicago? Over the years I have come to know a number of priests from Chicago. I have been impressed by them. Since the announcement of my appointment I have benefited from the generous assistance of Bishop Hayes and Bishop Abramowicz, Father Keating, who has guided the Archdiocese during the last four months, and many others. They have all made me welcome and helped in many ways.

While I do not know many of you personally, I feel that I know the priesthood of Chicago. It is more than just a local reality. It is a national asset. In the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s the years before, during, and after the Council the Church around the country has often looked to Chicago for leadership. Pioneering programs in youth ministry (the Catholic Youth Organization), family services (the Christian Family Movement), urban ministry, social justice, education, liturgical development, seminary renewal, the permanent diaconate, and many others were all developed here. Much good for the Church came from Chicago under

the leadership of Cardinals Mundelein, Stritch, Meyer and Cody. Many talented priests of the Archdiocese have contributed to the Church nationally and internationally. You are loved and respected all over the country. Your good works are widely known and praised. What do I think of you? I think you are a remarkable group of men. I praise you and applaud you. It is a privilege and a challenge to be called to serve as head of the presbyterate in this Archdiocese. I count on your help in meeting the challenges that lie before us.

IV. What Is My Vision?

What is my vision of the priesthood? I hope to answer in word and deed over the months and years to come. I look forward to hearing your answers as well. I have been a priest for thirty years, and I still do not fully comprehend the mystery of the priesthood. But this much I do know. The priesthood is not a job. The priest is not a functionary, not a general practitioner, not a poor man's psychologist. True, many things about priestly ministry resemble a job. Priests ask, for example, "where are you working now?" We have work schedules, organizations, a distinctive uniform. But still the priesthood is not a job.

Here in Chicago we are blessed to have one of the largest and most diverse communities of priests in America: diocesan and religious; pastors and educators, serving inner-city, suburban, and rural communities; chaplains in hospitals and jails; those in specialized ministries and those who serve at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center, to name a few. As important as this diversity is, ours remains the one priesthood of Christ.

We cannot measure our success and failure by the standards of the world. We must not think that moving from one post to another is "moving up or down in the Church," as if the Body of Christ were a giant corporation. Whatever each of us is called to do as a priest, we are all building up the Mystical Body. All ministry is pastoral ministry. We are all laborers for the one Harvest Master.

The priesthood is a passionate commitment, a fiery-eyed vision, and an insatiable thirst for holiness and practical justice. The priest is called to be challenger, enabler, life-giver, poet of life, music maker, dreamer of dreams. He must be a man of deep personal faith, conformed to Christ, a man who loves the scriptures, draws sustenance from the sacramental life of the Church, and truly knows the community with and for whom he offers sacrifice. A priest is a man with a clear sense of his own self, one who strives to develop all his natural talents to the limit for the good of the Church. He is a man of unreasonable hopes and expectations, who takes seriously, for himself and others, the injunction to be perfect as the heavenly Father is.

Priests of this generation will see George Orwell's menacing 1984 come and go. They will witness the start of the third millennium of Christianity. Together we face a future that is familiar yet startlingly new. As we proclaim that the reign of God is at hand, none of us knows where the Church is in her pilgrimage. Some suppose she has just begun the journey, others that she is at midpoint, still others that the goal itself is in sight. We do not know. But building upon the solid achievements of

the past, we must all set our faces to the future. Our lives and ministries will be the foundation stones for the Church to come.

To be good priests we must first be good men. This requires that we seek to understand the mystery of our whole humanity. We must make provision for our physical, emotional, and psychological health. We cannot hide from life. Our vocation is not a matter of "easy hours and no heavy lifting." Only by living life in all its complexity will we be able to serve our people with compassion. Our genuine interest and authenticity should be manifest. If we are truly comfortable with ourselves and have a deep appreciation of our celibate commitment, we should not fear opening ourselves to others in love and lasting friendships. Like everyone else, the priest needs affection.

Our priesthood must also be fed by an inner silence, a spiritual tranquility, public and private prayer, and an abiding joy. Without prejudice to the important social mission of the Church, the basic thrust of our efforts as priests must be spiritual. That is what is unique about our ministry. Indeed, only a radical spiritual commitment can sustain us in our efforts on behalf of the poor and downtrodden. To understand and appreciate this we must turn to Jesus Himself, seeking in Him the wisdom, guidance, and strength we need to fashion our priestly ministry. Any attempt to explain the priesthood apart from the mystery of Christ and His Church is fruitless. Any attempt to tear the ministerial priesthood from its roots in Christ and in the Church will bring disillusionment and failure. The effort to explain the priesthood in purely human terms, though often well intentioned, has in fact caused confusion and pain among

the best of us. Such efforts rob the priesthood of its essentially spiritual task of reconciling all people to one another and to God through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Father reminds us, the Eucharist is the very source of our identity as priests and the source, too, of our ministry to Christ's priestly people. In the Eucharist God reveals who He is to us in Christ, and we reveal who we are. In liturgy we seek to be men of public prayer, men of transparent, tangible faith, in order to inspire and encourage prayer in others. We can proclaim the gospel convincingly only if we have heard its echo in the stillness of our own hearts. We can break the bread of life only if we ourselves have been broken and given, and found life in the giving. As Pope John Paul tells us: "Our whole priestly existence is and must be deeply imbued with this service, if we wish to effect in an adequate way the eucharistic sacrifice in persona Christi." (Letter to All the Priests of the Church, Holy Thursday, 1979.)

Liturgical spirituality is not something we can put on or take off like a chasuble. It must be real. It must flow from who we really are. It arises from an intensely intimate relationship with Jesus, a relationship which can exist and be nourished only through prayer. Like it or not, we reveal our own prayer life -- or lack of it -- to those we would lead in prayer.

This is why prayer cannot simply be a part of our lives. It must be everything. It must be, as Teresa of Avila writes, the heavenly rain that waters the garden of our soul. Such prayer gives meaning to our priesthood, foundation to our liturgical ministry, clarity to our pursuit

of justice, and strength for our perseverance. It is the beginning of our eternal union with the Lord who is the greatest lover we will ever know.

V. What Are My Plans?

What are my plans? Do I have a program in my suitcase to make the Church of Chicago the living announcement of the nearness of the Kingdom of God that Christ calls it to be? No, I have no such program. But I do have the advice of the many people who have told me in one way or another that Chicago is a big city, take your time, get to know the place and the people, and most of all, listen. Listen to their joys and sorrows, hopes and aspirations. Listen to their stories of the Church. That is very sound advice, and I intend to try to follow it.

To aid my listening, I am reconstituting the Senate of Priests as of this evening. In the months and years ahead may it become a vital force in the life of the Archdiocese. I accept the suggestion of the Senate for a series of regional gatherings at which I can learn about the human family and the Catholic Church in Chicago from you, the priests. I look forward to visiting with the leaders of the Association of Chicago Priests. With your help, I hope to bring together the Senate, the Association, and the Board of Consultors in more efficient structures of consultation and collaboration. In time -- but soon -- I intend also to explore an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, so that I can better learn the needs of the religious and laity of the Archdiocese.

I intend to give special priority to visiting with priests in key positions in various offices, agencies, and programs in the Archdiocese. I

hope to learn firsthand how the Archdiocese is organized and to form an assessment of its practical needs. This is a necessary step in developing an effective team which I consider essential. As part of this process, it may be that, where ordination is not required, lay persons, sisters, and brothers will be invited into positions traditionally associated only with priests. Among other things, this will help us who are priests to become more open to the talents and legitimate aspirations of lay people in the Church. In any case, the overriding motivation of all our work in the central offices must be to serve the parishes.

I know very well that I cannot do alone all that must be done. None of us can do anything without Christ, and I can do very little without you. I am very human, subject to the same shortcomings and limitations as you. So I need all of you. I need your great talent, energy, collaboration, faith, loyalty, challenge, and honest counsel. One area of great importance where I shall seek your counsel in the months ahead is the recommending of worthy candidates from the presbyterate of Chicago for the office of bishop. A diocese of this size must have more auxiliary bishops. There are many reasons for this, but among them is the danger that otherwise people will lose their sense of "church" as something more than the local parish. Personal contact with bishops is necessary to counteract this tendency. In this regard, too, I am very aware that you have already asked that recommendations for auxiliaries show appreciation of the rich ethnic and racial diversity of our Church.

It goes without saying that in all my efforts as your new bishop, I shall be guided by the teachings, disciplines, and practices of the Church

in collegial communion with our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, pastor of the universal Church. I believe deeply that this is the will of Christ for the well-being of the Church and all its members. I am honored this evening by the presence of Archbishop Laghi, the Holy Father's personal representative in the United States. I ask you, Archbishop, to convey to the Holy Father our best wishes and our promise of prayers and support. Like the Holy Father, I, too, look in a special way to our Blessed Mother for guidance and assistance; I pray for her intercession on my behalf and on behalf of the Archdiocese.

VI. Conclusion

I cannot conclude without speaking of Cardinal Cody. I was four years old when the Cardinal became a priest, and he was Archbishop of Chicago longer than I have been a bishop. Thus we are men of different generations and different experiences of Church and episcopal ministry. I was saddened by the pain, suffering, and conflict that seemed to cloud his final years. He was called to leadership in the Church during years of unprecedented change and turmoil. The achievements of his fifty years of priesthood are real and lasting. By any objective measure, Cardinal Cody did many good things for Chicago which make my work easier. If any hard feelings, bitterness, or anger -- toward the Cardinal or among yourselves -- remain in your hearts for any reason, tonight is the night to cast off the burden and purify your hearts. Let us continue to pray for Cardinal Cody. May he be with God even as we speak.

One of the Cardinal's great achievements was the restoration of this historic and beautiful Holy Name Cathedral. I have been admiring the magnificent bronze panels by the contemporary Italian artist, Attilio Selva, above the cathedra of the bishop. The last panel on the far right of the chair portrays the holy name and priesthood of Jesus. It shows our Lord in priestly attire at the altar of sacrifice presenting the chalice of salvation to humanity of all races. We, the priests of Chicago, continue to offer that chalice both at Mass and throughout the day. When you pray now at the altar for the leaders of the Church, you will add my name to that of our Holy Father. And when you call my name, may we be united in a special way through the Eucharist.

As our lives and ministries are mingled together through the breaking of the Bread and the blessing of the Cup, I hope that long before my name falls from the eucharistic prayer in the silence of death you will know well who I am. You will know because we will work and play together, fast and pray together, mourn and rejoice together, despair and hope together, dispute and be reconciled together. You will know me as a friend, fellow priest, and bishop. You will know also that I love you.

For I am Joseph, your brother.