

40th Anniversary of Ordination
Vigil of Sts. Peter & Paul
Acts 3:1-10;
Galatians 1:11-20;
John 21:15-19
Little Flower - 6/28/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you all for coming to share my 40th anniversary of ordination with me. I cannot tell you how much it means to me to celebrate this Eucharist with you. My actual anniversary is tomorrow, June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter & Paul, Apostles. Therefore, today we are celebrating the Vigil of Sts. Peter and Paul.

In his homily at priesthood ordinations this year, Archbishop Tobin said that vocations to priesthood always have personal, collegial, and community dimensions.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote that God had chosen him and called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Most of you know that I had wanted to become a priest since I was six years old. As I celebrate my 40th anniversary of ordination, my life has certainly come full circle. Twelve years ago, I had the privilege of returning home to Little Flower. It was here that my family, the parish priests, especially Fr. John Riedinger, Msgr. Raymond Bosler, and Frs. Robert Borchertmeyer and Edwin Soergel, the Sisters and teachers who taught me at Little Flower School, including Sr. Martine, my first grade teacher, who is here today, Sr. Gaudentia, Sr. Quentin, Sr. Rosita, Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Bureker, and the parishioners of Little Flower shared their faith with me and nurtured my vocation to the priesthood.

In today's reading from Acts, Peter and John went to the temple together for the three o'clock hour of prayer. According to Archbishop Tobin, priesthood always has a collegial dimension. I learned what it means to be a priest and pastor primarily from the priests and pastors in my life. Besides the priests at Little Flower, the pastors with whom I have lived each had a profound influence on me: Fr. James Ethrington in London, Fr. Charles Noll at St. Malachy, Fr. James Moriarty at St. Matthew, and Fr. Mike Welch for eighteen years at St. Christopher. This does not include the priests who taught me at Latin School and St. Meinrad and in Rome. All of them helped shape my understanding of what it means to be a parish priest and pastor.

Finally, priesthood has a community dimension. Three times Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved him more than the others did. Three times Peter said yes. Three times Jesus entrusted his people to Peter: "*Feed my lambs....Tend my sheep....Feed my sheep.*" Priests are never ordained for themselves but for the people whom they will serve. In today's Gospel, Jesus suggested that Peter would embody his love for Jesus by caring for his people and that his care for the people would be in proportion to Peter's love for him. Likewise, today's reading from Acts suggests that ministry cannot be just words or talk but must involve deeds and service. However, the truth is that I have received from you, my family and friends, parishioners, and former parishioners, far more than I have given you. Many of you have had a profound influence on me, more than you will ever realize. Your love and friendship have been life giving to me.

My brothers and sisters, when I asked members of the staff what to write in my bulletin letter this week, one suggested that I share my personal insight on the priesthood. To use the words of Josef Goldbrunner, I believe my role is to make "Christ's love visibly, tangibly, humanly and personally present" to others through the ministries of Word, sacrament, and service.¹

¹Josef Goldbrunner, "Encounter – The Task of Becoming a Person," p. 8.