

Praying for our Seminarians

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We were blessed to have newly ordained Deacon Michael Russo visit our parish earlier this month (September 2) at the 11:30 AM Mass. Michael was our third seminarian at OLHOC (following Chip Lockett and Andrew Clyne; who are both now priests). Several of you asked me whether we could share his homily. Here is Deacon Michael's homily:

*It has been over four years since I served this parish for a summer. That is an experience that I am deeply grateful for; I am grateful to Fr. Alain for his example of priestly service and life of prayer. I am grateful, also, to Fr. John Clark and Fr. Agustin Lopez. And I am grateful for the many friendships and connections I made here. All of these have helped me discern with certainty that God is calling me to the priesthood. This certitude has been especially important to me in what is clearly a **time of turmoil in our Church**.*

*The past few months, weeks, and days have been difficult, and I suspect the challenges will continue. We have heard about a lot of sins in our Church. It is disheartening and there is no point in sugar-coating it. I do not know what the coming weeks and months will bring, but I do know that **we are a people of hope**. Our Church has weathered many crises, both internal and external, and She will survive and continue to be a channel for God's grace in the world, if we stay holy. Right now, **each of us can commit to living lives of holiness so that we can be the ones to move the Church forward**.*

*Jesus gives us a way to do this in the Gospel. He challenges the Pharisees and Scribes over the issue of uncleanliness. They are upset that certain customs were being ignored, and Jesus asks them, "How does one become defiled?" It does not come from some external thing of force. It is from within. That means it is a choice we make. We are free to sin. This also means that we are free, with the help of grace, to stop sinning. We need to look within ourselves to identify what are our sins and how to overcome them. When we take that step we can move forward with God's help. I think this is a continual process. The early Church knew that Baptism forgave all sins, but they came to realize that we can still sin after, hence God's gift of the sacrament of confession. **Life is a continual conversion which will involve many confessions**. This process can be summed up in the words of St. James: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only."*

*We gather each Sunday to listen to the Word of God and to receive the Word Himself in the Eucharist. This is the spiritual foundation of our lives. We are meant to build upwards from that foundation. Catholicism is not just a one-hour-each-Sunday time commitment. When lived authentically, it is a **way of being**. We come here to worship God as a community to hear His word and be fed by the Bread of Heaven, and then we leave. The great sin of the scribes and Pharisees was their hypocrisy. They did the external practices of faith, but it was a façade. Sadly, some in our church have put up that same façade. The best response we can have to their inability to be authentic/façade is to be doers of the word ourselves. Leave this Sunday liturgy **living the Catholic faith**. Yes, **pray more**. Yes, donate to charity. Yes, read the bible. Keep in mind the two examples St. James offers: **love those most in need and keep oneself free of sin**.*

*Our world and our Church are going through a very challenging time. Yet, we are people of truth and we cannot shy away from that. We have the greatest ally: **the grace of God**. I believe the great lesson of Christian history is that **holy people can change the world**. Sin has been in our church from the start, yet that first generation was still able to bring the message of the Prince of Peace to all corners of the planet.*

With God's aide and Mary's intercession we can be doers of the word. Our Lady Help of Christians, Pray for Us.

Clearly, Deacon Michael is disheartened by the ongoing turmoil in the Catholic Church: sins of the clergy and its many suffering victims. Deacon Michael, however, keeps hope and invites all of us to stay holy: "each of us can commit to living lives of holiness so that we can be the ones to move the Church forward." I totally agree with Deacon Michael. In these challenging times for the Church, we are all invited to strive for holiness and keep the Church united. To be holy is to be with God! To be holy is to be unstained by sin. I invite all of us to go to Confession, promise to amend our lives with God's help, and obtain full reconciliation with God.

Let us pray for all the seminarians of our Archdiocese, especially Leon , Pablo, Deacon Michael and Deacon Joseph! May God protect them and may the Holy Spirit guide their discernment to the priesthood!

Let us also pray for all the victims of the clergy abuse, their families, and for the Unity and Sanctity of the whole Church!

One in Christ,

Fr. Alain