



The Hands of a Priest

Homily from the Ordination
of Father Steve Garza
St. Francis of Assisi Church, Bend
27 June 2019

We began this Mass as we always do, listening to the Word of God. What do tonight's Scriptures tell us about priesthood? From the perspective of heaven what is a priest?

By God's command Jewish priests came from one tribe, the tribe of Levi. "The Levites have been set aside from among the children of Israel and dedicated to Me," God tells them through Moses. "The Levites shall be *mine*." Their life was to be spent *for* the people "in the service of the Dwelling"—the Meeting Tent where the Israelites could count on God to be present to their praise and petition. The priests' special calling, therefore, made them men accustomed to being in the presence of God. For they needed to step before Him regularly to accomplish their indispensable task: to offer sacrifice for the people.

In that light tonight's Gospel presents a bit of a puzzle. Jesus of Nazareth did not live the life of a Jewish priest, because He was not one. A descendant of David of the tribe of Judah, He was never mistaken for a Levite. Instead of serving in the Temple, St.

Matthew tells us, "Jesus went around" doing other things: "teaching," "preaching the Gospel," "healing diseases." Never was He to be seen offering sacrifice in the Temple.

Only at the end of His life did Jesus show Himself to be the priest He had been all along. Taking bread in hand at the Last Supper, He told the Apostles it was now His Body "*for*" them; and the chalice of wine was now His Blood "*for*" them. By deliberate anticipation Jesus made present at this first Mass the self-giving Sacrifice of the Cross He would offer the next afternoon. Under the blazing sun on Calvary Christ was both the Victim offered and the Priest Who offered—an unendingly New Sacrifice established by an incomparably New Priest. "Priest forever in the line of Melchisedech," the Crucified Christ offered once and for all the unsurpassable sacrifice of Love.

With this mystery never far from his mind, St. Paul reminds Timothy in tonight's second reading to "[s]et the believers an example in speech and conduct." Paul is speaking to you as well, soon-to-be *Father Steve*. Be a priest dedicated to preaching the Word of God. Be a priest ever willing to sacrifice yourself for the people you are sent to serve.

Certainly tonight's Scripture readings help us understand God's design for His priesthood, but there's another source of insight we can tap into as well. "Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into His vineyard," Jesus instructs us. We've been doing just that these past few

months, Deacon Steve, with your upcoming ordination in view. Our prayer for priestly vocations sketches our hopes for the new life you're about to embark on. What do we learn from it about the priesthood?

We begin by asking God to “call forth from among us men who are able to sympathize with our weakness and deal gently with the wayward.” These words bring to mind St. Matthew's description of Jesus' priestly gaze. In His eyes the crowds that came to Him were “like sheep without a shepherd,” and He “had compassion on them.” “His heart was moved with pity for them.” Let your priestly heart beat in tune with the Master's.

Next our prayer asks for priests “who will give us confidence to draw near to the font of mercy and find grace in time of need.” We think of the people who singled out the Apostle Philip for help. “We want to see Jesus!” they told him. Seekers just like them will come to you, Deacon Steve. They too will want to see Jesus, and they'll sense that you can point their eyes in the right direction. They'll bring their heart's hope to you because, like the Levites of old, God has set you apart as priest to lead His people back to Him. Help them to seek Him. Help them to find Him. Help them to know Him. Help them to love Him.

In the final petition of our prayer for vocations we ask the Lord of the Harvest for priests “to hand You over to us in the Breaking of the Bread.” It is for that life work that your hands will soon be consecrated, Deacon Steve—for the Breaking of the Bread.

What could be more important? Sometimes it seems there is nothing around us but brokenness. Broken hearts. Broken lives. Broken world.

Jesus breaks into our brokenness through the hands of the priest. In a moment those will be *your* hands, Deacon Steve.

From this day forward may your life show you to be the priest we've been praying God to send us.