



'We no longer live for ourselves but for Him'

*By Bishop Michael
C., Barber, SJ*

From Bishop Barber's homily on the occasion of the ordination of Thomas William Biegler, SJ, on July 11 in Sacramento:

Billy, I was impressed with the few lines you wrote in the program, especially the first sentence: "Every day is a lesson in surrender." It reminds me of St. John the Baptist's line when looking at Our Lord, "He must increase; I must decrease." St.

Paul said, "We are no longer to live for ourselves but for Him, who died for us." St. Ignatius said, "Take, Lord, and receive." All in the same line.

The reality is it's a lifelong process, this surrender. A lot of times I feel I haven't even begun. Most of us live in between John the Baptist in the desert and Norma Desmond in "Sunset Boulevard." We're in between. We're always trying to give ourselves over and over, more and more, to our Lord.

We're always trying to die to ourself so that Jesus can live in us. The more space we make, the more He can fill us up. Especially now that you're no longer just going to be Billy but Father Billy, you represent someone so much greater than yourself and ourselves.

St. Paul said God has reconciled himself to the world and through Christ given us the ministry of reconciliation.

There are many aspects of the priesthood, but one of the most important, especially in today's world, is the ministry of reconciliation.

We go to Santa Rita Jail to have little penance services during Lent and Advent, accompanied by laypeople. Inmates live in little pods made up of 30 to 40 men.

This is what's it like: The officer lets you in. The men are at recreation. Some are watching the news, some are playing cards, some are doing push ups.

You just say, Hello, guys. I'm Father Barber. I'm with the Catholic Church. We have a sacrament called confession. Jesus gave us the power to forgive sins in his name. So if anybody would like to have their sins forgiven, I'll be over in a corner.

People always come. People always line up to be reconciled to God, have their sins forgiven by the only One who can, Our Lord, but through your hands, through your priesthood.

Here's another example: With the coronavirus, many parishes don't have secretaries to answer the phone. One lady called her parish. Her father was dying of cancer. Her priest told her he was too old, and might catch something if he went to him.

She kept calling around; finally she called the diocese. "My dad is dying of cancer," she said. "He needs a priest for Last Rites."

I saw that email. As long as I'm bishop, no one in this diocese is going to die without the Last Rites. I called her up and said I'll be there in an hour.

So you go into the room with people you've never met before and you walk in and you hear this, "Thank God the priest is here." Not Mike, not Billy, not Chuck. "The priest is here." I baptized him. I anointed him. I gave him Holy Communion. The tears rolled down his eyes in gratitude for that God moment.

That evening, at dinner at the rectory, we were going around the table, how was your day.

"I did five annulments."

"I got the budget ready for the cathedral."

"What did you do, Bishop?"

"Today I opened the gates of heaven to a man. And I'm going to sleep so well tonight knowing I could do that."

That's what you will be able to do.

One thing that attracted me and many of us to join the Society of Jesus was the plurality of ministries. You could be a doctor. You could be a lawyer. You could be a teacher. You could be a coach. You could be an expert on sales at Costco and be a minister. You could do any kind of ministry to help bring the kingdom of God here on earth.

Sometimes you might be in a ministry of administration or fundraising, all necessary things, but it might be a little dry sometimes as a priest. Whenever you feel a little dryness in your priesthood or the flame is going down a little bit, take a parish call. Can you take a few Masses? Can you hear confessions for the First Communion kids? Can you come on a retreat and hear confessions for the kids? Go and exercise the power of reconciliation and mercy that's given you today. That flame will reignite and get stronger. You'll be so grateful to be able to represent Christ in that situation.

One last thing: You and your classmates chose this Gospel of Peter going to confession to Jesus after the resurrection, and Jesus reconciling Peter to himself and to God the Father.

When we had a retreat in this province in 1991, it was a big Ignatian anniversary. Carlo Martini, archbishop of Milan, this famous Jesuit cardinal, flew here. There were 300 Jesuits in the theater at Santa Clara University. When Cardinal Martini spoke to us about reconciliation, he looked out at the crowd, he said there are two kinds of Jesuits in this auditorium: those who go to confession regularly and those who have postponed it indefinitely. I hid under the chair in front of me.

To be a good priest, you need to experience for yourself the reconciliation given by Jesus and you also need again to represent Christ when people come to be reconciled to Him through you.

I'd like to say to you, my brother Jesuits, thank you for the ministry you give to other priests. In this instance, when Peter was with Jesus, Jesus was ministering to one of his priests. Jesuits have a long history of serving as spiritual advisers and confessors to priests. I really appreciate that ministry. You help one priest, you help his whole congregation. Follow that example of Christ and Peter.

You said every day is a lesson in surrender. When I anoint your hands with the Holy Chrism, I will bind them with the cloth in which the Sacred Chrism, rich and fragrant, will stain that cloth. It's a beautiful symbol. The binding of your hands signifies what Jesus also said to Peter, when you were young you went and did what you want; now when you're older your hands will be bound and someone will lead you maybe somewhere you might not want to go. But it is where you want to go, once you have surrendered yourself to Christ. Wherever he leads you, it's going to be OK.

The recent St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, after having made a retreat of the Spiritual Exercises and hearing the Suscipe of St. Ignatius, had his own version. He said, "I do not ask to see. I do not ask to know. I ask only to be used."

Feed His lambs. Feed His sheep.