

June 6, 2020 10:00 a.m.

St. Ann Parish, Augusta

Ordination to the Order of Deacon for David A. Pinto

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Opening Comments:

First of all, I want to welcome everyone to St. Ann Parish Church for this solemn, joyful, long-time-in-coming Ordination of one whom we all know and love, David Alexander Pinto.

I welcome all who have traveled distances to join with David, and those members of David's Family and dear friends and fellow parishioners who are able to be here in modified numbers.

But I also welcome the many, many people who are joining us virtually through our livestreaming of this special Mass---all those who would want to be here, but are unable.

These are, to say the least, unusual times, as we continue dealing with the effects of the worldwide pandemic that has held us all in its grip for more than 3 months.

I also want to acknowledge that this is a sad moment in the life of our Diocese as our beloved Bishop James Murray, my immediate predecessor and the third Bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, was just yesterday morning, called Home to God to receive the rewards of his long and faithful priestly life. While our Faith gives us great reason to rejoice with him in his "home-going", it still leaves us all with a sense of loss, and that human grief that we all experience. Bishop Murray would never miss a special moment in the life of our Diocese, especially an Ordination, and I know that he's not missing this one either---I am confident that he is with us in a new and special way, praying for David, and praying for and with all of us. May he rest in peace.

So, this is an Ordination for the history books for all those reasons. But in spite of pandemics and even the human sadness of death, this Ordination----the first Ordination in our Diocese in the last two years----is a cause of great Joy for all of us.

“We choose this man, our brother, for the Order of the Diaconate!”

We just heard this wonderful statement which I was privileged to declare on behalf of all of us. We choose this man...”-----we----those of us who have traveled here to St. Ann Parish on this beautiful Spring Saturday morning. We----all of us--- who have accompanied David on his life journey thus far: his dear parents, Alex and Georgia who are with us from their Heavenly vantage point; his very large family of 10 siblings, their spouses, more than two dozen nieces and nephews; his other family members, friends, teachers; all the wonderful parishioners of St. Ann Parish which has been David’s spiritual home for 20 years, and parishioners also from St. Joseph and St. Monica Parishes in Kalamazoo where he grew up; his formators, classmates, parish priests and Bishop. We-----all of us who make up the Church. We choose this man, our brother, in fact and in faith, for special, ordained service in the Church.

And of course, David himself is included when we talk about “we”. You aren’t a passive participant, nor are you chosen against your will. You have wanted to be a priest for many, many (many!) years.

And we---all of us---are convinced that your choice and the Church’s choice are one and the same.

Now, as we all know, this is not a typical ordination; and David is not a typical, young 4th Theologian, ready to be ordained as a young deacon. No, the “life-journey” that has brought David to this moment has indeed been out of the ordinary, and unique in so many ways. In fact, from my perspective, David’s journey to this point has been inspiring, and a powerful example of perseverance on David’s part, and a sign that the old spiritual truism, “God writes straight with crooked lines” is actually very true. In spite of the good-natured “senior” puns, and references to David’s age by his much younger classmates over the course of these last almost 6 years he’s been in our Priestly Formation program and at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, David has won the great respect and admiration of all of them.

But for all of us who know that “age is relative”, and especially those of us who know, and love, David Alexander Pinto, David’s age is irrelevant, because he is young at heart, inquisitive in his desire to learn, eager to gain all the knowledge and skills that he will need to make him a good priest, and excited to put his knowledge and learning, both academic and from his lived experience, to use in

providing pastoral and sacramental care for the people that he so very much wants to bring to Jesus. And I can very honestly say that David's, shall we say, "untypical" age to be ordained a deacon, is nothing but a positive advantage for all of us who will benefit from his ministry.

And so we---all of us---rejoice today. We have just expressed that joy with thunderous applause. And that is fitting---it is right and just! It makes this 6th day of June a truly GREAT day in the life of the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and the Church Universal, in spite of the sadnesses of the day here in our Diocese, and the other realities all around us in our world that are of great concern.

But besides the choice that "we" make in calling David Pinto to Holy Orders, there's something much more important at work in all of this, as I know we all realize. The first part of the statement I referenced is of greater importance: ***"Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose this man, our brother..."*** While we definitely have an important---even essential---role to play, what's most important of all is that we must "rely" on the help of God.

As we know, this joyful Ordination day is taking place on the Eve of the beautiful and solemn Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. As Christians, we believe in one God, Who has 3 Persons: our Loving Father---His Son Jesus Christ---and the grace and guidance of their Holy Spirit. God is incomprehensible; the Trinity is a Mystery of our Faith.

Now, I think most priests would tell you that of all the seminary courses that we all take, two that are most challenging, and even to be feared, are: Thomistic Philosophy, and the Theology Course on the Trinity. Of course, I'm sure that David excelled in that particular course on the Trinity at Sacred Heart Seminary. But, we all know that the Mystery of God can only be comprehended to the extent that God reveals Himself to us---which of course He has consistently done throughout all of Revelation. Beginning with the ancient Covenant He made with Abraham, but most dramatically when God sent His only-begotten Son Jesus into the world, His Word, made Flesh, to dwell among us, and to save us from our sins.

By the way, David has both the great privilege, as well as the unenviable challenge, of preaching his very first Homily as an ordained Deacon tomorrow for

this great Feast of the Holy Trinity. I'm sure you'll do a great job, David. (But just in case, please say a prayer for him.)

The most important point in all of this, David, is to remember that it's not just your choice to become a priest, nor my choice to "call" you to Holy Orders; but it's God Himself Who is calling you----and we rely on God's help, and the Saving Mission of our Lord Jesus, to help you be a good and holy deacon, and one day soon, a Priest.

We heard about how the Order of Deacon came to be in this morning's First Reading from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. As the Apostles recognized that the needs of the early Christian community were expanding, they decided on a "division of labor", so to speak, establishing the Order of Deacons who were to be involved in the works of charity, liturgy and administration within the community, which then would allow them, as the Order of Priests, to focus on the teaching of the Faith and the preaching of the Good News of the Gospel. The two, very basic criteria for being a deacon was to be a "*reputable man, (and to be) filled with the Spirit and wisdom.*" David, while you are being ordained a Deacon, as you know, it's what we call a "transitional" deacon, meaning that God willing, you will very soon move on to the Order of Priesthood. But, no matter what--- you need to always maintain "a deacon's heart"---you always need to treat others with compassion, you always need to follow Jesus' example of being willing to wash the feet of your sisters and brothers and to serve the needs of the least among you, by practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the people in your care. That "heart of a deacon" should remain with you always.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul pleaded with the Ephesians to "*live in a manner worthy of the call you have received*". God has called you for a reason, David. He started calling way back in your young life, and even though there were lots of important, and commendable reasons why you "paused" from responding to that call, to selflessly help your widowed Mother raise your Siblings, and for you to take over the family business, God didn't stop calling you. He wants you, even after all these years, which, as we know for God, is like a second. And because He wants you, you have to live even more now in "a manner worthy of the "Call" you've received"----allowing all those beautiful virtues that St. Paul held up for particular consideration, namely "*humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with others lovingly*"---to work for what is the most important quality of all: "*unity of the Spirit thru the bond of peace*". As a Deacon, and soon to be a priest, you are to help people, "*the holy ones*" for "*the work of ministry*", and to

help all of us to grow into that “spiritual maturity” in the building up of the Body of Christ; and to always----always----work for unity.

Finally, in today’s Gospel, we heard Jesus confirm that the “choice” to be counted among His disciples is not just ours but His as well. He directly told His Apostles: *“It was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.”* Jesus wants you, dear David, to “remain” in His love. But even more than that; He wants you to stand in His place, and to bring Jesus’ Love to your sisters and brothers, your family and friends, those people to whom you will be assigned---to bring all of them closer to Jesus, so that they can know His saving love. That’s why Jesus gave all of us who choose to follow Him the most important of all commands: *“As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you.....Therefore you are to love one another as I love you.”* But, for you, my dear Son, David, and for all of us whom God calls to be His ordained ministers, we are to be particularly mindful of that command.

You will hear me say in just a few moments in the Instruction: “Now dear son, you are to be raised to the Order of the Diaconate. The Lord has set an example---that just as He Himself has done, you also should do.” And what did Jesus do? We heard Him tell us: *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are My friends when you do what I command you.”*

Very shortly, David, I will ask you to make 7 solemn and life-changing promises---if you are willing: 1) to be consecrated for the Church’s ministry, 2) to give your life in humble charity, 3) to pray constantly for the needs of the Church and the world, 4) to conform your life to Christ, 5) to believe and teach what the Church believes and teaches. In addition, 6) you will make the solemn promise of Celibacy so that you can be a living sign to the world of the presence of the Kingdom of God which is “at hand” and in fact, which is here among us. And finally, 7) you will make the Promise of Obedience to me and my successors as you seek to do God’s will, not your own. All of these promises require a true “dying to self” in order to be able to “rise to New Life” in Christ. And all of these virtues require you to pursue virtues that are not only counter cultural, but truly go against our basic human tendencies----but which also lead us closer to Christ, and therefore to eternal life.

Of course, the Ordination Rite will be completed by the solemn “laying on of hands”, the ancient sign of “being chosen” and “set apart” for the work of God, setting you apart---demonstrating that you truly ARE God’s chosen one---chosen and ordained to bring Jesus to your people, and to bring yourself, and your people, to Jesus. Once more, we know that for you to be faithful to your Solemn Promises, to give witness to the joy and freedom of a life of Celibacy and Obedience, you need help---you simply cannot do this on your own.

That’s why you need to ***rely on the help of God*** if you are going to be faithful to your Vocation, and joyful as you live out your Vocation in our world that so desperately needs Jesus’ Good News, especially in these days of anxiety, worry, racial tensions, and a growing distancing of ourselves and our society from God. How do you do that? You can only do that through a deep and vibrant relationship with Jesus, rooted in a strong, consistent, and faithful spiritual life.

In just a few moments, you will be asked to lay prostrate on the floor, in complete abandonment to the will of God, and in total supplication to God for His grace and mercy. While that moment is powerful, it’s really only symbolic of what I pray will be a constant “prostration” of your life before God, in humble supplication and in constant mode of prayerful intercession for yourself and for your people. Through the faithful praying of the Divine Office, the daily reception of the Eucharist, a strong devotion to our Blessed Mother, and regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially frequent Confession--these are the ways that God’s Help will truly be your strength. Through your ministry of charity and service to the poor, in the example of Jesus Who showed us what it means to be truly great by washing the feet of His own disciples, you will BE Christ’s Love to those in need. As you baptize, witness marriages, preside at wakes and funerals, and lead people in prayer and devotion, you will be building up the Body of Christ.

My dear son, as well as my beloved brother in the Lord, you are not alone. You are surrounded both by those here with us in this Church of St. Ann, as well as all those who aren’t able to be here in person but who are participating virtually; all of us who love, support and need you. But even on those occasions when you find yourself alone, or *feel* alone, know that you are never truly alone. Remember always to keep “relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ”, to call on the loving intercession of our dear Blessed Mother, and to be inspired by the communion of Saints who, as you already know, are anxious to intercede for you to God, and to cheer you on. And so, on this day of your

Ordination as a Deacon, on this Trinity Sunday weekend, and for every day to follow, may everything you say and do give God the praise that is His due. Let your life “be” this prayer: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!*