

Mass of Thanksgiving- First Homily after Ordination  
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October 3, 2021

**“All is Gift”**

Our Scripture readings today, and the most wondrous gift of Holy Orders I received yesterday, affirm that all we have in our lives on this earth (that is to say, our mortal lives) and in the next life (our eternal life), are gifts from God. As I use the word gift, I wish that you consider its use as meaning grace, which in turn means God’s love. For it is God’s love, His grace, that is the origin of all that is good in our lives.

This morning’s first reading, from the Old Testament Book of Genesis, relates the creation narrative wherein Adam is gifted with Eve. The Creator spirated, that is to say, breathed forth into mankind, a spirit, or soul, establishing mankind as the highest of His created beings. Despite being gifted with all that was needed to live in harmony with their Creator, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and thus mankind began a long and enduring relationship with sin. I would submit that we should consider sin to be any behavior or action that is contrary to God’s will for us.

Our New Testament reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, describes God’s gift of His Son in the Incarnation. Our Creator assumed a human body and nature, living some thirty-three years, including a three year public ministry during which He taught His apostles and disciples the Way, the Truth, and the pathway by which they, and we, might achieve eternal Life. His glorious Passion, Death, and Resurrection achieved victory over death and sin and secured the promise of eternal life. Christ humbly adopted a human nature so that we might recognize, and strive for, a divine nature. Christ Who consecrates, that is, Who makes holy, and we who are being made holy, share the same origin. Therefore, Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Many of you doubtless recall the signs some fans would periodically display in football stadium end zones on which was written the Scripture passage from the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that

whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” It is in the gift of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that we recognize Almighty God’s greatest gift to mankind.

Christ lovingly and humbly assumed a human nature so that mankind might be reconciled with the Father. The Good Shepherd is quoted in the Gospel of John: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). During his approximate three-year period spent teaching His disciples, Jesus patiently and persistently revealed by both word and deed His authority over both nature and sin, an authority by which he was recognized to be the Son of God by those receptive to His message of mercy and love.

After His glorious Resurrection, the Risen Lord appeared to His disciples in Galilee, as He had promised. Having laid the groundwork for the Church which He would head, He issued His Great Commission which concludes Matthew’s gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus gifted mankind with His sacraments, which are signs of God’s love that effectively communicate God’s grace. A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality – namely, the love of God. A sacrament is a point of encounter with God; it is the experience of God reaching us and we reaching God. Sacraments both signify and cause God’s love in us.

Christ blessed His Church with seven sacraments, including the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist), the sacraments of Healing (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick), and the sacraments of Commitment (Matrimony and Holy Orders). God’s greatest gift to us is the gift of Jesus, His Son, Who will soon invite us to receive Him in the Eucharist, the source and summit of our Christian life. The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist offers us a taste of the divinity which awaits us in our heavenly abode.

Reflecting on this Mass of Thanksgiving, I feel blessed, humbled, and grateful that God has called me to serve Him and His Church as a married member of the clergy. In Mark's Gospel reading of today, Jesus emphasizes the importance and sanctity of marriage in His dialogue with the Pharisees, harkening back to the Book of Genesis and the story of creation. Christian marriage is the human pledge of lifelong love and exclusive fidelity that is a sign of the divine pledge of enduring love by which God bestowed Himself on the people of Israel. Having previously been called to the vocation of physician, I perceived a more recent calling that has resulted in my ordination to the Permanent Diaconate. This new vocation calls for a devotion to serve God and His people by proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the Sacraments, and continuing the charitable mission of Christ.

I am admittedly a bit nervous in embarking on this new phase of my earthly journey, but I'm confident that I've been called by the Holy Spirit and groomed for service to God and His people. I thank the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for this call to service, and I humbly ask for your prayers that I may preach the Gospel boldly, celebrate the Sacraments faithfully, and serve God's people charitably. I thank my wonderful wife Christine for her willingness to share in this journey, and for her unwavering encouragement and support of my new vocation. I also thank our sons, Connor and Thomas, for their love, support, and prayers for a fruitful ministry. I pray that my work in service to our Lord will inspire them to an ever closer relationship with Jesus. I thank my deceased parents, Jennie and John Ashburn, who shared their gifts of faith, hope, and love with me and my siblings. I also thank the members of this faith community, of which I've been blessed to be a part for the last twenty-eight years, for their prayers and support during my years of formation. I'm pleased to report that I've officially been assigned by Cardinal Sean O'Malley to serve as Deacon at St. Mary-St. Helen-St. Thecla Parish, with a secondary assignment in the Archdiocese of Boston's Pro-Life Office. I'm greatly looking forward to serving this parish community, and continue to ask for your support, prayers, and friendship. I request that all of you actively thank, and pray for, the priests and deacons of this parish and those listed in the Mass of

Thanksgiving program, as each has played a significant role in my formation journey, and, I'm sure, in your individual faith journeys. I thank, also, all of the parish ministry personnel and the administrative staff who have contributed to this joyous Mass of Thanksgiving.

We will soon begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and many of you will be called forward to receive our Lord. As you gaze upon the Real Presence during this Eucharistic celebration, I pray that you consider and contemplate the greatest gift you will ever receive during your earthly lives, and leave this house of worship committed to imitating Jesus in your thoughts, words, and deeds. I thank you for your love and prayers. Know that you will all remain in my prayers, and may the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continue to bless us all. All is truly gift! Amen.