



HOMILY OF BISHOP THOMAS J. TOBIN
EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF AUXILIARY BISHOP ROBERT EVANS
DECEMBER 15, 2009

It is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you to the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul for this happy and historic occasion – the Ordination of our brother Robert C. Evans to the Office of Bishop.

Welcome first of all to his Eminence, William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop Emeritus of Baltimore; to our Metropolitan, Archbishop Henry Mansell of Hartford; and to all the archbishops and bishops who are with us today.

Welcome to the family of Bishop Evans, especially his dear mom, Lola, and to his many friends, some of whom have traveled a great distance to be here.

Welcome to the priests, deacons, religious, seminarians and laity of the Diocese of Providence; a special welcome to members of St. Philip Parish and School, where Bishop Evans has served so faithfully; welcome to the leaders of the ecumenical and interfaith community of Rhode Island, as well as the public officials who are here today.

Thank you all so much for joining us; your presence – each and every one of you – adds to the joy of this occasion.

Bishop Evans, in my own name and on behalf of all those present today, we extend to you our congratulations, prayers and blessings on this wonderful day in your life. It is, without a doubt, a day of great joy and grace – for you and for the Church. We are proud of you, happy for you and grateful that God has called you to this new ministry, and that you have responded so graciously and generously to His rather persistent invitation.

My brother, the Scripture readings we have listened to today help to answer the question that is foremost in your mind right now, namely – “What in heaven’s name am I doing here?”

Well, in fact, you are here because God wants you to be here. Our Heavenly Father has led you to this holy place and to this sacred moment to fulfill the plan for which He created you. Or, as Jesus said to His Apostles at the Last Supper and with words He now repeats to you, “You did not choose me; I chose you.” That, my friend, is why you are here today!

Those words of the Lord Jesus – “you did not choose me, but I chose you” – bestow great credibility as well as enormous responsibility upon the Apostles and their successors. Nonetheless, as you begin this new and awesome ministry, you can do so with confidence, for Jesus also said to His Apostles, “I no longer call you slaves, but I have called you friends.”

-more-

Strengthening that friendship with Christ is the goal of the entire Christian life, is it not? But it is also a source of consolation and hope for you. If you are a true friend of the Lord, you have nothing to fear as you gaze into the future and respond to the Lord's promptings in your life.

In announcing the Year for Priests, Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict explained that as priests, (and surely as bishops) everything we do is oriented to proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ. This echoes the words of our Holy Father when he said, "Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is . . . There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ."

It is that life-changing, life-giving, hope-inspiring encounter with Christ, dear friend, that has led you to this moment.

But if the Gospel explains why you are here, the words of the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah explain what your Ordination as a Bishop will mean for you in the days to come: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me."

Today as you receive the fullness of Holy Orders, you are anointed with the Holy Spirit and with sacred chrism; you can readily appropriate the words of the prophet unto yourself: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He has anointed me."

Of course this is not the first time you've been anointed with the sacred chrism and the Holy Spirit. You were anointed at your Baptism, when you were first joined to Christ and incorporated into His Church; and then again at your Confirmation, when the gifts and grace of the Holy Spirit were strengthened; and then again when you were ordained to the priesthood, when you were set apart to serve the Church "in the person of Christ, the head of the Church."

But this anointing today signifies and effects another step in your relationship with Christ and His Church: it challenges you to grow in holiness and deepen your friendship with Christ; and it calls you to renew the enthusiasm and zeal of your service to God's People. The teaching of the Church emphasizes that, "the title of Bishop is one of service, not of honor" – words not to be taken lightly.

This anointing with the sacred chrism and the Holy Spirit renews your call to be a priest, prophet and king. While these mandates belong to all of the Christian faithful, and in a specific way to ordained priests, they are particularly heavy burdens placed squarely upon the shoulders of a bishop, burdens as real and tangible as the Book of the Gospels that will soon be held over your head during the Prayer of Consecration.

A bishop is called to the fullness of the priesthood. As a priest he is to be a holy man, a man of prayer, a living icon of Christ among His people. As the Ordination Rite explains, a bishop is to "offer sacrifice for the people committed to his care, and to devote himself wholeheartedly to seeking every kind of grace for them from the fullness of Christ's holiness."

Secondly, a bishop is anointed to be a prophet, a man imbued with the Word of God and commissioned to preach that word to the Church and the world – sometimes comforting, sometimes directing, and sometimes challenging – preaching fearlessly and boldly nonetheless, “in season and out of season.”

Finally a bishop is called to share in the kingship of Christ, that is to form and lead the Church, the holy people of God. Again, the Ordination Rite explains, “As one chosen by the Father to rule over his family, be mindful of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and is known by them, and who did not hesitate to lay down his life for them.”

To be united to Christ – to be a priest, prophet and king – all this is intended by the anointing with the sacred chrism and the Holy Spirit that you receive here this day.

The Episcopal Ordination that we celebrate today with such festivity takes place in the context of the beautiful and peaceful Season of Advent, when “we wait with joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” And one of the principal Biblical figures of the Advent Season, and of course the Christmas Season, is our Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary.

Devotion to Mary is a hallmark of our Catholic Faith and properly so, for authentic devotion to Mary always leads us to Christ, her son. It was Mary’s obedience that enabled God’s eternal plan of salvation to be fulfilled. It was Mary’s faith and trust that allowed “the Word to become flesh and dwell among us.” How Mary rejoiced at receiving the Eternal Word into her life, and how faithfully she shared her son with the world.

My brother, at this challenging moment in your life, I encourage you to take to heart and to prayer the example of our Blessed Mother. This holy day marks a new beginning for you, but the future is hidden from your eyes, and the path you will walk is known to God alone. Therefore, like Mary, you must have faith and trust; you must be at peace in accepting God’s plan for you.

Welcome the Word of God into your heart and soul, and joyfully share Jesus with others.

In your daily ministry to God’s people, point to Jesus and say to them: “Do whatever He tells you.”

If you follow the example of Mary, you will always be able to echo the words of her hymn, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior; the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.”

My dear brothers and sisters, in this blessed season of Advent let us recognize the presence of, and renew our faith in “Emmanuel,” the God who is with us. And let us pray that the same God will bless our brother Robert, and bring to completion the good and holy work we do here today.