

May 21, 2016, 10 a.m., St. Augustine Cathedral

Ordination to the Order of Priest for Jose de Jesus Haro Gomez, Bruno Ebubechukwu

Okoli, Andrew Paul Raczkowski and Paul George Redmond

Jer. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 5: 14-20; John 20:19-23

“This is the Day that the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it! Alleluia!” What a perfect day for an Ordination - gorgeous, spring day - Everything is in full bloom, the sun is shining and all is right with the world - at least here in this part of the world! It’s so nice to celebrate Ordinations at this time of the year. Liturgically we’re still within the Octave of Pentecost, fully completing the Joyful Easter Season, and on the Eve of the great Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity which we will all celebrate tomorrow. As we continue to rejoice in the glorious Good News of Easter - that Jesus is alive; as we take great comfort in the power of Pentecost and the great gift of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us and guides the entire Church; and as we place ourselves completely in our belief in the mystery of the Holy Trinity - One God as revealed in the Three Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - As we find ourselves at the juncture of these most important liturgical moments - our local Church comes together to celebrate the most joyful event any Church can celebrate----the Ordination to the Priesthood of four young men who, in just a matter of minutes, will be changed dramatically and essentially, conformed to Jesus Christ, High Priest, Good Shepherd, and Saving Servant. The huge round of applause that we just heard resounding throughout our Cathedral following the “Election” of these four Candidates, who are your sons, your family members and relatives, your dear friends, and our brothers in Christ - is a wonderful demonstration of the huge amount of joy and happiness that fills the hearts of everyone here this morning. This truly is the day the Lord has

made; and we rejoice in every fiber of our being and we are glad in every way possible -

Alleluia!

It truly is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to one and all! In particular, I welcome: Bishop Murray, our Emeritus Bishop; My brother priests who are here in such great numbers today. In that regard, I'd like to remember one of our priests in particular, Fr. Chris Ankley, our Associate Vocations Director, who at this very same time is celebrating the Funeral Mass of his dear mother, Carol Ankley, in Lapeer, Michigan. Our Vicar for Clergy, Fr. Bob Creagan is there with him representing all of us. May Carol Ankley rest in peace. Amen!; My brother deacons and their wives; The visiting priests and deacons from other Dioceses, especially classmates of our four Candidates, and in particular three of the faculty and administration of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit where our four soon-to-be priests were formed: I welcome Msgr. Todd Lajiness, the Rector; Father John Vandennakker, Director of Pastoral Formation, and Father John McDermott, Theology Professor. I welcome all those priests, religious and lay leaders who have helped in any way to form and educate our four Candidates. You have played a very significant role in their lives. I welcome all the people present from our four Candidates home parishes here in the Diocese: Deacon Jose's home parish of St. Joseph Parish here in Kalamazoo; Deacon Andrew's and Deacon Paul's home parish of St. Monica Parish; and Deacon Bruno's home parish of St. Thomas More Parish. And of course I am very pleased to welcome all the proud relatives: aunts/uncles/cousins; grandparents and siblings of our Candidates. In particular I am pleased to recognize Deacon Bruno's uncle, Father Francis, and Bruno's brother, Dr. Ifeyanyichukwu Okoli who have come all the way from the Diocese of Okwa in Nigeria to be here for this very blessed event. I also want to welcome members of the Igbo Catholic

Community in Detroit who are from Deacon Bruno's home area, along with a group of Sisters present from a Nigerian Community of religious women.

Finally, I welcome all the immediate family members, and most especially the parents of our Candidates, those here this morning with us in person, as well as those who have already gone Home to God and are with us from their very special heavenly vantage point: Deacon Paul's parents, George and Lena; and Deacon Bruno's father, Joseph. I want to mention in particular also Deacon Bruno's mother Fidelia who wanted to make the trip from Nigeria but was not able due to her health concerns. We hope they are able to be joining us today through our live-stream feed of this Ordination Mass via internet.

We are pleased that Deacon Jose's parents, Ofelia and Jesus (along with his grandmother Petra and aunt, Sr. Amada Rios from Puerto Rico) are here; along with Deacon Andrew's parents, John and Carol.

In the name of the Church, I thank the parents and the immediate families of our Candidates very much for your generosity in giving your sons to the Church and encouraging them all along the way of their formation so that today, they can become fathers for all of us, and for the hundreds and thousands of their new spiritual family members to whom they will be sent.

To everyone here today, I say: Welcome and Congratulations to us all!

Our families - our close friends - our associates - are extremely important in the entire process of formation. The seminary plays a critical role in that formation and education of our future priests; however, we can never underestimate the absolutely essential role that families play in fostering vocations – it's in our homes where we learn to love; it's in our homes where we put our faith into practice; it's in our homes where we first get an inclination about what God might

be calling me - any of us - to do with our lives. Pope Francis is talking about that a lot, especially in his most recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* - "It is important for families to be part of the Seminary process and priestly life since they help to reaffirm them and to keep them well-grounded in reality." (# 203)

In that regard, then, I would ask that all families encourage your children to prayerfully consider what their gifts/talents are, and to at least consider whether becoming a priest or a religious man or woman might not be what God is calling them to be.

Speaking of that, there is a special group of young men here, 22 of them, who are to one degree or another thinking about/considering the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. I'd like to recognize them in a special way. Would you please stand up?

We heard about a young man in our First Reading today who was not quite sure about his vocation. Jeremiah, who became one of the greatest and most powerful Prophets in the Old Testament, seemed a bit reluctant in his own vocational discernment process. We heard in that reading God say to Jeremiah: "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you... and dedicated you, and appointed you a prophet to the nations.*" And even though Jeremiah wasn't so sure and offered the excuse to God that he might be too young, or not quite ready, or maybe inadequate in some other ways, we heard the Lord God Himself encourage Jeremiah by saying: "*Say not 'I am too young'; To whomever I send you, you shall go; ... Have no fear... because I am with you... says the Lord.*"

Those words are spoken directly to each of you, Jose, Bruno, Andrew, Paul - I know that at times, we all feel a bit inadequate. I realize that the enormity of what you are about to do can feel somewhat overwhelming. That's why it's so good, not just to hear these words of your

loving Father spoken to you today - but to know that's what God says to you every day; in every circumstance; no matter what is going on: *"Go where I send you... Know that I am with you. There is nothing to fear!"*

Jeremiah lived in a world where there were lots of challenges and we know that he endured suffering---but he prevailed because God was faithful to His promise. We too live in a scary world. There are things that could be challenges for us.

For example, we celebrate this Ordination Day today on the Feast of a group of Martyrs known as the Cistero Martyrs. On this day, 16 years ago, Pope St. John Paul II canonized St. Cristobal Magallanes Jara and 21 other priests and 3 lay people who were martyred for their faith in the very same village in Mexico where Deacon Jose's family came from, in Totatiche, Jelisco, Mexico in 1917. That's less than 100 years ago.

We know that the Church is thriving in so many different parts of Africa, and in particular in Nigeria where vocations are plentiful. However, the Church has struggled in Nigeria and been persecuted in many different parts of the very same area where Bruno comes from and where his family lives - tribal warfare and experiences of genocide taking place that have roots in religious persecution. We live in a world that even today here in our country is growing less tolerant of religion and more willing to raise the idea of persecution of people for being people of faith from political and judicial persecution which is taking place right now in our country, and which could increase to something more violent.

My dear Deacon Candidates, you are being sent into areas where people will welcome you with open arms, and where your ministry will be appreciated and valued; but you also will very likely have to deal with resistance to your ministry, and perhaps even rejection of what you have to

preach and teach in the Name of Jesus and the Church. God speaks those very same words to you as He did to Jeremiah: “*Go where I send you; Have no fear because I am with you to deliver you.....See, I place My words in your mouth!*”

The Ordination Rite and the Instruction I will give to you in just a few moments from that Rite so beautifully and powerfully expresses the theology of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and how your priesthood, and the priestly ministry of all the priests gathered serving here in our Diocese flows from the authority of my role a priest with the fullness of Holy Orders. But what is most important is to know that you and I, priests and Bishop, are integrally, essentially and sacramentally united, and are called to work together as one.

Right after the Ordination, I will give to each of you your first priestly assignment. I know, you can hardly wait for that, right? But as we all know, there are no bad assignments in our Diocese! I pray that you will allow those words of Jeremiah to give you comfort and “*go where you are being sent*” with no fear or hesitation, knowing that God’s Holy Spirit will always guide you and be your strength.

In fact, just the day before yesterday, most of our priests here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo received new priestly assignments. I’d like to say a special word to my brother priests. We are in the midst of an historic moment in the life of our Diocese. As a still relatively young Diocese, turning 45 years old in July, we have had to go through a process of re-aligning our priestly distribution and our parishes into Collaboratives in a way that has never been done before. We are almost through that process, a process which I realize has been stressful for everyone.

I hope this does not appear to be too paternalistic, but it is paternally sincere coming from me as the Father of our Presbyterate, when I say how grateful to you, and proud of you I am. Your

willingness to participate in and contribute to this process of moving to a Collaborative structure, and most especially, your willingness to accept new assignments, to me, has been inspiring and gratifying, and I thank you.

And to you, the members of the faithful of our Diocese, the parishioners of the 59 parishes which are being re-configured into 28 Collaboratives, I express my gratitude to you as well. It takes flexibility and willingness of spirit on the part of all of us to make these adjustments so that we can in the best possible way provide pastoral ministry and sacramental care to all the faithful in our Diocese. But it is particularly challenging to our priests, most of whom are being asked to move to new assignments or take on additional responsibilities. That requires truly a sense of Christ-like self-sacrifice and willingness to do what is good for the Church and not always what is personally comfortable or preferable.

And so I would ask you all to join me in thanking our priests in particular for being a wonderful and loving Presbyterate in service to the Faithful of the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

Jose, Bruno, Andrew and Paul, you are indeed being ordained to serve the Church at this historic time in the life of our Diocese; but even beyond our Diocese, you are being ordained at a very historic moment in the life of the Universal Church. You are being ordained in the midst of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Our ministry as priests is essentially tied into the ministry of reconciliation. We heard Jesus say that so clearly in today's Gospel, when Jesus confirmed His apostles to be His priests. As you recall, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, huddled together behind locked doors, on that first Easter Sunday evening, and took away their fears by saying: "*Peace be with you!*" And then, since no amount of words could explain to them how He could be standing there before them gloriously

resurrected from the dead, He simply showed them His hands and His side---He showed them His wounds from His suffering and death; yet here He was, Alive! It was Easter! And it's been Easter ever since, no matter what other dark moments the Church may have experienced over these past 2,000 years, and no matter what other challenges we may still encounter: Jesus always stands before us, reminding us about His wounds---His suffering---the effects of sin; but Alive! It is always Easter, and that is our message as His priests: Jesus is Alive!

But that's when Jesus offered them the gift of His Peace once again, and then gave them their assignment: "*As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.*" Then He breathed on them and said: "*Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive are forgiven them; and whose sins you retain are retained.*"

Priesthood is essentially tied into our mission to bring forgiveness for sins, to work for reconciliation, and to be instruments of Jesus' love and mercy in a world that may not even know how much they long for and need that love and mercy!

As we know, Pope Francis' theme for this Jubilee Year of Mercy is "Merciful like the Father". And he has told us frequently that a priest is never any more like the Father than when he is hearing confessions and being instruments of Jesus' love and mercy to those to whom we are sent. What we always need to do is to keep the image of Jesus, gloriously resurrected and alive, ever before our eyes, not only today on your Ordination Day, but every day of your priestly lives. When all is said and done, we come to realize what St. Paul told us in our beautiful 2nd Reading this morning: "*The love of Christ impels us!*"

The love of Christ has brought salvation to the world. The love of Christ has made all things new. And the love of Christ drives us, encourages us, impels us to share this Good News of our faith to whomever we are sent.

Jose, Bruno, Andrew, and Paul in just a few moments you will prostrate yourselves on the floor of this Cathedral in that ancient act of complete submission of your will - your personal ambitions, your preferences or desires, to be one with God's holy will for you as it is revealed through the Church. And during that time, all of us will intensely pray, and we will call on the Saints and all the powers in Heaven to pray with us as well, so that you can be faithful to the promises you have made and to be joyful and happy priests of Jesus Christ.

I ask you to keep God's words of reassurance in your heart: "*Have no fear... I am with you.*"

And keep the image of Jesus, gloriously alive, standing before you as He sends you to be instruments of His love and mercy. Love the people to whom you will be sent; love them with the love of Christ - love them with His sacrificial, servant love; love them with a joyful and life-giving love.

I pray that you will not be able to help yourselves because, as St. Paul said: "*The love of Christ impels us!*" "*El Amor de Cristo nos a-pray-me-a!*" "*Ee-foo-na-nya Choo-kwoo Na edoo on-yee!*"

Yes, this is a day of great joy and celebration for the whole Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo. Our Church is enriched by your Ordination. You are being sent to bring Jesus' love and mercy to us. You are being ordained to be Christ for us. The love of Christ impels you to do that to make all things new!

If you are faithful priests, Christ-like priests, happy and joy-filled priests, your priesthood will not only bring joy to others, but you will also have a life time of happiness and satisfaction.

Stay close to our dear Blessed Mother, who will always, in turn, keep you close to her Son, and our Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Yes, this is the Day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be truly happy in it! Alleluia!