

## Celebration of the Institution of Lector(5); the Institution of Acolyte(7)

October 25, 2019      7:30 p.m.                      Sacred Heart Major Seminary

(including our Seminarians: Jacob Thomas, Lector; David Pinto, Acolyte)

(Deut.30:10-14; John 6:24-35)

Msgr. Lajiness, my brother priests on the Administration and Faculty, and visiting priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Friends and dear Family members---and most especially, dear Candidates for the Ministry of Lector and Acolyte: all of us Sisters and Brothers in the Lord--- Praised be Jesus Christ!

It is both a joy and a great privilege to celebrate this special event in the lives of these 12 Seminarians, those who have just been presented to us as the Candidates for both the Ministry of Lector and the Ministry of Acolyte. This is a significant moment along the way of the lengthy process of formation as you prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It's a joyful moment and one worth celebrating---we all extend to you our warmest Congratulations. It's also a "moment" that calls for prayerful reflection on the significance of these two very ancient Liturgical Ministries which date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the early Church.

When I was where you are sitting in the late 1960's, what we now see as "ministries" were actually two of the 4 Minor Orders of porter, exorcist, lector and acolyte which I received in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Theology, leading to Ordination as Subdeacon in 3<sup>rd</sup> Theology, before the being ordained a Deacon in the summer before my 4<sup>th</sup> Year Theology. Though the Second Vatican Council updated and changed these **Orders** into **Ministries**, the fact remains that this "moment" in your formation definitely marks a significant step along the way toward what we hope and pray, God willing, will lead you all to the Order of Deacon and ultimately to Priesthood.

For those of you being instituted into the Ministry of Lector, reading God's holy Word is nothing new to you. You've been doing that, I hope, since you were old enough to read and understand---so, in the literal sense, you've been a "lector" for most of your life. But as a Ministry within the Church, you are not just reading God's Word, but now you are entrusted with proclaiming God's Holy Word with a certain official status on behalf of---in the name of---the Church. And, as the liturgical Instruction that we will hear shortly elaborates, that "status" carries along certain important responsibilities of instructing others in the Faith, accompanying and preparing candidates for the Sacraments, and helping to make God's Word known to those who do not know God; you become an Evangelizer.

As the beautiful First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy so clearly stated this evening, we are "*only... (to)... heed the Voice of the Lord, your God, and keep His commandments and statutes that are written in this Book of the Law*". Our God makes Himself Present in His Word so that we don't have to go up into the sky, or cross the seas, or search in the darkness---God's Word "*is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.*" And for us, God's Word has become Flesh in Jesus, Who has brought us salvation. It is Jesus, the Word made Flesh, Who is entrusted to you to be proclaimed in Word, in Truth, and thru the patterns of your lives.

That is why you must get to know Jesus in His Word; to meditate on the Word; to pray the Word, and, thru God's Holy Spirit, be enlightened, strengthened, guided, and nurtured by Jesus' Word. The more you mediate on Jesus' Word, the more you will come to **know** Him. Your official proclamation of the Word, and your teaching of the Word, will carry some authority only when it gives clear evidence that you know not just "what" you are saying, but "Who" you are

proclaiming. Or to put it another way, the Church gives you her Word, for you to protect, safeguard, and proclaim it to all the world, in the Name of Jesus; and you, in turn this evening, give the Church your word, that you will be faithful in carrying out this sacred duty with devotion and integrity.

For those of you being instituted into the Ministry of Acolyte, you are being called to special service at the Altar. You are called into a deeper relationship of love and care for the Most Holy Eucharist, the Source and Summit of the Church's life, the Gift of Jesus Himself in His Sacred Body and Blood. Since that very special day when you were 7 or 8, and you received your First Holy Communion, you have been privileged to come to know and love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It may also be that you were, at some point over the years of your youth, an Altar Boy.

But as you are instituted as an Acolyte of the Church, you become much more than a glorified Altar Server. You are entrusted with the special responsibility of caring for the Eucharist by assisting priests and deacons in carrying out their ministry at the Altar. You will also be privileged to distribute the Eucharist at Mass, as well as to bring the Eucharist to those who are sick or home-bound. To be an instrument of bringing Jesus Himself to our sisters and brother in the Faith, whether during Mass, or to their homes, in the hospitals/nursing homes--- that is a great joy, a special privilege and an important responsibility. I hope you never take that for granted, or underestimate its awesome importance.

Our Diocese just had a powerful experience this past weekend. On Saturday, we hosted our first-ever *Eucharistic Congress*. We rented out the entire Radisson Hotel in downtown Kalamazoo: the huge ballroom, and all their break-out rooms. And, my brothers and sisters, we filled that hotel to overflowing with more than 1,000 people, of all ages, from our many diverse ethnic backgrounds---our English speakers, our large Hispanic population, our growing Burmese population, and from among our African-American and Native-American sisters and brothers as well. They came from just about every parish in the 9 counties of our Diocese. They came to spend the day with Jesus, Present in the Eucharist. We began with Mass, carried Jesus in procession thru the Hotel to a room of Reservation for Adoration throughout the day, and concluded with a procession thru the hotel, around the nearby streets of Kalamazoo, ending with Benediction.

I mention that because I believe our people are hungering, thirsting, and yearning for a renewed focus on this most Precious Gift of the Eucharist; we saw clear evidence of that this past Saturday. In spite of the recent Pew Research Study, which revealed that only 30% of Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, I believe that our people are longing for **us**---for their bishops, priests, deacons, and their acolytes/lectors---to lead by example. They need **us** to show that we **know** that Jesus is Present in His Word, in the way we proclaim AND live it; that we Love Jesus in the Eucharist, in the way that we revere His Sacred Presence, and let it transform our hearts into hearts of charity and compassion.

As we heard in this evening's Gospel passage, the people went to great lengths to follow Jesus. But Jesus knew that their motives were mis-placed. They were looking for more bread and fish, having just experienced the miracles Jesus performed. That's why Jesus told them: "*Do not work for perishable Food, but for Food that endures for Eternal Life.*" That is the Gift of the Eucharist, the Gift that Jesus gives us of Himself to be our imperishable and enduring Food for our Journey of Faith. And this Gift is Jesus' "*work*"---so that we can "*know Him in His Words, and so that we can believe in Him Whom God has sent.*"

My dear sons in the Lord, soon-to-be-Acolytes, just as Lectors need to know the Word before they can proclaim it effectively, so too must you love Jesus in the Eucharist before you can worthily, devoutly, and faithfully fulfill your responsibilities of special service of the Holy Eucharist. Your own personal Eucharistic devotion is essential; you can not be an effective priest until your life is Eucharistically-centered. Your prayerful participation in daily Mass, **and** your faithful observance of your daily Holy Hour, are both essential to keeping you strong and spiritually nourished so that you can worthily fulfill your responsibilities in this new Ministry. As an Acolyte, you move one step closer---you are literally on the threshold of Holy Orders. But before you get there, we need to focus on what happens here this evening as you become Lectors and Acolytes.

You don't stop being a Lector when you become an Acolyte, and you won't stop being an Acolyte when you are ordained a Deacon. In other words, these are not just steps to cross off a checklist of pre-requirements for your ultimate goal of Priesthood. Each step along the way is significant, and formative, and helps you become the spiritual person you are, and the joyful disciple of Jesus you are becoming. As Jesus told us in this evening's Gospel passage, when you bring Jesus to those who believe in His Presence, "*they will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.*" You will only be able to do this if your own heart is "on fire" with the Loving Heart of Jesus---if you have a Eucharistic heart.

And so, my dear sons in the Lord, we rejoice with you in this special moment. You, who are to become Lectors, knowing God in His Word; and you, who are to become Acolytes, loving Jesus in His Gift of the Eucharist---may you continue moving forward in these final years of formation, so that **know**-ing Jesus, and **love**-ing Jesus, you may come to truly **serve** Jesus in the ways you called to do, as deacons and priests, but always with the Heart of Jesus that you are called to be for the sake of Jesus' Body, the Church.

God bless you, now and always.