

**Homily for the Ordination of Paul Bonk and Braden Maher
to the Sacred Order of Deacons
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**Saturday of the Third Week of Easter
April 25, 2015**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here this morning to celebrate this important day in the life of this local Church of Springfield in Illinois as we prepare for the ordination of two men to the Sacred Order of Deacons.

When the Church uses the word “ordination,” she is speaking of the “sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons.”¹ This sacramental act is the conferral of the sacrament known as Holy Orders. This sacrament is unique in that it can be conferred on three separate occasions, each time with a different degree of participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Bishops and priests participate directly in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ, while deacons are ordained to help and serve the bishop and his priests, thus the term “deacon” which comes from the Greek word for service, *diakonia*.²

It would be a mistake to overlook the significance of this ordination, seeing it as just another hurdle to clear on the way to the priesthood. While it is certainly very likely, God-willing, that these two men will indeed take the next step to the priesthood in just over a year, that step would be impossible without first being ordained as a deacon. The same is true for all of us in the sanctuary today who are ordained ministers. None of us could be here without our ordination as deacons, and that ordination continues to be an important part of our identity in our call to be of service to Christ and His Church through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

My dear sons, this is a significant moment in your life and in the life of the Church. Just a few moments ago, you were called to enter into the sanctuary. This is more than just a practical step so that we can better see one another! It signifies that you are making an important transition from your current state as a member of the laity to become a member of the clergy. You will soon share in that unique brotherhood that we all share with one another as ordained ministers.

This transition requires that you understand that your life will be different from this point forward. As the name of the sacrament suggests, your life will now be ordered exclusively to the holy pursuit of giving your

life to Christ and His Church. It is therefore helpful to reflect on what this ordering of your life should entail as you prepare to enter this new way of living. To accomplish this, we can briefly reflect on each of the promises that you are about to make as they contain a concise summary of how your life is to be ordered from this point forward.

The first promise deals with your being resolved to be consecrated for the Church's ministry by the laying on of my hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit. You are affirming that by your own free choice, you present yourselves for the Order of the Diaconate. While every vocation begins with God's initiative, He does not force us, but gives us the freedom to accept or reject His call. Even though the Church has attested to the authenticity of that call, your free response is still required so that this new ordering of your life is seen as something that you joyfully and freely embrace, as opposed to seeing it as something being imposed upon you against your will.

Next, you will promise to discharge your office as a deacon with humble charity in order to assist the priestly Order and to benefit the Christian people. Humility is one of the key virtues to practice as a deacon. The words of our first reading from the First Letter of St. Peter sum this up

nicely as we hear him say: “Beloved: Clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for: God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). Pride should never find its way into your dealing with the priests whom you will assist or the people of God that you will serve. You must never see yourselves as better than others just because you are ordained. Rather, your ordination calls you to greater humility as you order your lives to live more perfectly as disciples of Him who came not to be served, but to serve.³

Closely related to this humility of service is the next promise, where you will humbly resolve to hold fast to the mystery of faith, proclaiming this mystery in word and deed according to the Gospel and the Church’s tradition. When it comes to teaching and preaching, your job is to preach the truth as it has been handed on to us by Jesus Christ, as we heard in the Gospel for today’s Mass, when He commissioned His disciples and their followers to spread the Good News until His return in glory.

There is no shortage of voices in and outside of the Church who offer their own commentary or views on what *they* think the Church’s doctrine should be. As an ordained minister, you must at all times strive to be faithful to the Church’s Magisterium so as to not let the faithful be led

astray. You have, undoubtedly, already begun this in your seminary formation, but it is something to keep always before you. In this regard, it would be helpful for you to adopt the ancient motto of *sentire cum ecclesia*, which roughly means “thinking with the Church.” This is a recommendation for all of the faithful, but it is one about which you will need to be especially mindful, so that your thinking, preaching, teaching, and acting will always be ordered according to the Gospel and the Church’s tradition for the purpose of being a reliable guide for those who follow you.

Following this promise is the one that you will make in embracing the celibate state as a sign of your dedication to Christ the Lord for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Once again, the state of celibacy is not to be seen as a necessary requirement simply to be endured, but one to be freely and joyfully welcomed into your life as a great gift, allowing you to order your life to Christ more easily with an undivided heart, thus enabling you to minister more effectively.

You next make the promise to celebrate faithfully each day the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the people of God and indeed for the whole world. Once again, this is a practice that you have already acquired during

your time of formation in the seminary, but ordination makes this practice more than just a devotional one. Your prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours is ordered more intensely toward officially interceding for the needs of the Church, of whom you are an ordained minister. Each time you pray the Divine Office, you bring with you the many prayer requests that people entrust to you, as well as the many prayers voiced throughout the world.

The next promise that you make is a summary of what is expected of you as a deacon, when you resolve to conform your entire way of life to the example of Christ. Everything that you do should reflect the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. You are to order your life in such a way that you can say as St. Paul did in his letter to the Galatians: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Your response indicates that you humbly recognize that such an imitation is only possible with God's help and that it is not something you can do by your own power. But with the grace that the Lord will bestow upon you in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, you will be capable of fulfilling this demanding, yet beautiful life of ordained ministry.

Finally, you promise respect and obedience to me as your bishop and to my successors in this episcopal office. This obedience is not the type of

subservience that a soldier gives to a military commander or an employee gives to a supervisor, but is modeled on the example of Jesus, who was obedient to His heavenly Father, even unto death on a cross.

I would like to conclude our treatment of the various ways in which you are being invited to live this new ordering of your life by stressing the importance of keeping in order your personal relationship with Christ. This is accomplished through spiritual practices such as daily mental prayer, sacred reading, the Rosary, the examination of conscience, and frequent confession. Intentionally committing yourself to these practices now, not making exceptions or excuses when you are too tired or too busy, will ensure that the exercise of your ministry now and in the future will be as fruitful as possible. Without that regular contact with our Lord, especially in the Eucharist, you will “lose your edge” and devolve into a mode of pastoral activism, where your focus is more on what you do, without truly understanding who you are as a beloved son of God, called by Him to share an intimate relationship with Him and share in His work of preparing souls for Heaven.

It is my prayer for both of you, Paul and Braden, that you embrace this new way of life by living that well-ordered life that is expected of you by

Christ and His Church. I ask all of us who have already received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to renew within our hearts that commitment to let our lives reflect the ordering expected of us in our ministry, so that we too can be more effective in our service of working for the salvation of souls. Finally, I ask all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to pray for these men, and indeed for all of the Church's ordained ministers, that we might be open to the grace of our ordination, so that we can be of greater assistance to you in your earthly pilgrimage of faith as we all strive to hear those welcome words at the end of that journey: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy our your Lord" (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23).

May God give you this grace. Amen.

¹ CCC 1538

² CCC §1554

³ Matthew 20:28