

Homily for the Ordination of Deacons

**Alex McCullough
Daniel McGrath
Jayke White**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear priests, deacons, consecrated religious, seminarians, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good for us to be here for the ordination of Alex McCullough, Daniel McGrath, and Jayke White to the diaconate, as the next major step on their path to the ministerial priesthood, which, God willing, will take place a year from now, together with Bruce Scott, who is already an ordained deacon, and Troy Niemerg, who will be ordained to the diaconate on September 28th at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Alex McCullough is the son of Chris and Angie McCullough. He calls Immaculate Conception in Mattoon his home parish and credits the pastor of that parish, Father John Titus, as being a great mentor who helped him navigate his early days of discernment. After attending Southern Illinois

University in Carbondale and Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, he transferred in the Fall of 2016 to Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis. After graduation in 2018, he took two years off, first working at Decatur Memorial Hospital and then teaching at Saint Teresa High School in Decatur. He completed his theological studies at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Indiana.

Daniel McGrath is the son of Mark and Catherine McGrath. He calls Sacred Heart in Virden his home parish and says it was at Eastern Illinois University where he met a small group of men who were discerning the priesthood. Among them was Alex McCullough and now-Father Zach Samples, who was ordained a priest last year. After one year at EIU, Daniel transferred to Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and then Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis, during which time he also did a pastoral internship at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Decatur.

Jayke White is the son of Tami and Leon White. He calls Saint Mary Parish in Edwardsville his home parish and says his interest in priesthood goes back to when he was only three years old! My mother tells me I was about four years old when I started talking about wanting to be a priest, so I guess in comparison to Jayke that makes me a late vocation! He entered the

college seminary right out of high school, but took a year off before returning to complete his seminary studies at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Indiana.

I note that our ordination this evening is taking place as we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost this Sunday. So I think it is fitting that we reflect on the role that the Holy Spirit has played in your discernment and how the Holy Spirit will guide you in your ministry in the years to come.

Whenever I celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation, I meet before Mass with the Confirmation candidates to explain some of the many symbols that we use in the Church, such as the Sacred Chrism with which they will be anointed and by which they will be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. I ask them if they have ever seen a spirit. Of course, they say no, you cannot see a spirit. I then point out that there are many things that you cannot see that are quite real, like the air we breathe. If there were no air in the room, we would be choking or suffocating from asphyxiation (lack of oxygen). I also ask them if they have ever seen wi-fi. No, comes the answer again. So how do you know if there is wi-fi in the room? Well, if you have internet access on your computer, you must have a wi-fi connection. But there might also be bars on your phone or computer that indicate whether

wi-fi is present and how strong the connection is. I tell them that those bars are symbols, telling us that something is present that we cannot see.

Since we cannot see the Holy Spirit, God also uses symbols to tell us when His Holy Spirit is present, but that symbol is not always the same. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Gospel tells us that the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove (Matthew 3:16). In the description of Pentecost in the *Acts of the Apostles*, we are told that the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples as tongues of fire, which came to rest on each one of them (Acts 2:3). Jesus is known as the Christ, which comes from the Greek word that means the one anointed by God's Holy Spirit, and is recognized as the Messiah, the Hebrew word for the Anointed One. Thus, in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation and the Ordination of Priests and Bishops, the presence of the Holy Spirit is symbolized with Sacred Chrism, the holy oil that is consecrated by the Bishop here in the Cathedral at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week. It is also by the Apostles' imposition of hands that the Holy Spirit is given (Acts 8:17-19; 13:3; and 19:6). Since there is no anointing with Sacred Chrism in the ordination of deacons, it is through the imposition of hands by a Successor of the Apostles that the Holy Spirit is imparted to those being ordained to

the diaconate, which is done in silence to underscore the silent and hidden work of the Holy Spirit.

Most of the time the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives is invisible and not readily apparent to us. Sometimes it is only in retrospect that we can discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. I am sure as you look back at your vocational discernment you can see at least traces of how the Holy Spirit has worked in your call to Sacred Orders.

During this past week between the Solemnity of the Ascension and Pentecost Sunday, our daily readings from the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours have addressed different aspects of the Holy Spirit.

On Monday, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem compared the working of the Holy Spirit to the various effects that water has on different plants. He says:

Water comes down from heaven as rain, and although it is always the same in itself, it produces many different effects, one in the palm tree, another in the vine, and so on throughout the whole of creation. It does not come down, now as one thing, now as another, but while remaining essentially the same, it adapts itself to the needs of every creature that receives it. In the same way the Holy Spirit, whose nature is always the same, simple and indivisible, apportions grace to each man as he wills. Like a dry tree which puts forth shoots when watered, the soul

bears the fruit of holiness when repentance has made it worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. Although the Spirit never changes, the effects of this action, by the will of God and in the name of Christ, are both many and marvelous. The Spirit makes one man a teacher of divine truth, inspires another to prophesy, gives another the power of casting out devils, enables another to interpret holy Scripture. The Spirit strengthens one man's self-control, shows another how to help the poor, teaches another to fast and lead a life of asceticism, makes another oblivious to the needs of the body, trains another for martyrdom. His action is different in different people, but the Spirit himself is always the same. *In each person, Scripture says, the Spirit reveals his presence in a particular way for the common good.*¹

On Tuesday, Saint Basil the Great wrote about the various titles given to the Holy Spirit, saying:

The titles given to the Holy Spirit must surely stir the soul of anyone who hears them, and make him realize that they speak of nothing less than the supreme Being. Is he not called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, the steadfast Spirit, the guiding Spirit? But his principal and most personal title is the Holy Spirit. . . . The Spirit is the source of holiness, a spiritual light, and he offers his own light to every mind to help it in its search for truth.²

On Wednesday, we read from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, about the mission and various charisms of the Holy Spirit in the Church:

The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple. He prays in them and bears witness in them to their adoption as sons. He leads the Church into all truth and gives it unity in communion and in service. He endows it with different hierarchical and charismatic gifts, directs it by their means, and enriches it with his fruits. . . . Moreover, the Holy Spirit not only sanctifies and guides God's people by the sacraments and the ministries, and enriches it with virtues, he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every state of life, assigning his gifts to each as he chooses. By means of these special gifts he equips them and makes them eager for various activities and responsibilities that benefit the Church in its renewal or its increase, in accordance with the text: *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for a good purpose*. These charisms, the simpler and more widespread as well as the most outstanding, should be accepted with a sense of gratitude and consolation, since in a very special way they answer and serve the needs of the Church.³

Yesterday, the reading from Saint Cyril of Alexandria described how the Holy Spirit changes us:

It can easily be shown from examples both in the Old Testament and the New that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell; he so transforms them that they begin to live a completely new kind of life. Saul was told by the prophet Samuel: The Spirit of the Lord will take possession of you, and you shall be changed into another man. Saint Paul writes: As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, that glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, transforms us all into his own likeness, from one degree of glory to another. Does this not show that the Spirit changes those in whom he comes to dwell and alters the whole pattern of their lives? With the Spirit within them it is quite natural for people who had been absorbed by the things of this world to become entirely other-worldly in outlook, and for cowards to become men of great courage. There can be no doubt that this is what happened to the disciples. The strength they received from the Spirit enabled them to hold firmly to the love of Christ, facing the violence of their persecutors unafraid. Very true, then, was our Savior's saying that it was to their advantage for him to return to heaven: his return was the time appointed for the descent of the Holy Spirit.⁴

In today's Office of Readings for the Memorial of Saint Philip Neri, Saint Augustine speaks of the joy that comes from life in the Spirit, saying:

The Apostle tells us to rejoice, but in the Lord, not in the world. Whoever wishes to be a friend of this world, says Scripture, will be reckoned an enemy of God. As a man cannot serve two masters, so one cannot rejoice both in the world and in the Lord. Let joy in the Lord prevail, then, until joy in the world is no more. Let joy in the Lord go on increasing; let joy in the world go on decreasing until it is no more. This is said, not because we are not to rejoice while we are in this world, but in order that, even while we are still in this world, we may already rejoice in the Lord.⁵

Alex, Daniel, and Jayke: As we celebrate your ordination to the diaconate this evening, we pray that the grace of the Holy Spirit will have marvelous effects in your lives, blessing you with the unique charisms you will need in your ministry, changing you as needed to be courageous disciples, and filling you with the joy that only the Lord can give.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Cat. 16, *De Spiritu Sancto* 1, 11-12.16: PG 33, 931-935. 939-942.

² (Cap. 9, 22-23: PG 32, 107-110).

³ *Lumen gentium*, nn. 4 et 12.

⁴ Lib. 10: PG 74, 434.

⁵ Sermo 171, 1-3. 5.