

**Final Vows for Brother Joseph McIver
of the Canons Regular of Saint Thomas Aquinas**

August 16, 2024

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

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here this evening for the celebration of the Final Vows of Brother Joseph McIver of the Canons Regular of St. Thomas Aquinas. I welcome you here to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the Mother Church of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. For the past few years, the brothers of this community have not only been away from their home here in our diocese, but indeed out of the county as they have attended to their seminary formation at St. Philip Seminary in Toronto, Canada. Having completed their formation, I am pleased to welcome them back home for good, giving them the chance to settle in more fully to their monastic rule of life in their own home in Madison, Illinois, in the southern part of our diocese.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of receiving the final vows of three sisters of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, whose motherhouse is located not far from yours in Alton, Illinois. At that celebration, I invited the sisters to reflect on the central role of the Eucharist in religious life, a theme particularly important during this time of Eucharistic Revival in our country. It is a theme that is equally important for your community as well, so it is worth reviewing some of those main points with you this evening.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* on the Consecrated Life and Its Mission in the Church and in the World, Pope St. John Paul II wrote the following about the Eucharist and consecrated life:

In the first place, the *Eucharist* “contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread, who, through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, offers life” to the human family. This is the heart of the Church's life, and also of the consecrated life. How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of

his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God's pilgrim people? By its very nature the Eucharist is at the centre of the consecrated life, both for individuals and for communities. It is the daily viaticum and source of the spiritual life for the individual and for the Institute. By means of the Eucharist all consecrated persons are called to live Christ's Paschal Mystery, uniting themselves to him by offering their own lives to the Father through the Holy Spirit. Frequent and prolonged adoration of Christ present in the Eucharist enables us in some way to relive Peter's experience at the Transfiguration: "It is well that we are here". In the celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood, the unity and charity of those who have consecrated their lives to God are strengthened and increased.¹

Brother Joseph, as you consecrate yourself more fully to Christ by making your final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, I invite you to find in the Eucharist the fountain from which you will draw the strength you need to faithfully live your vows day in and day out as you pray and work for the sanctification of the Church.

Not only is the Eucharist the source of grace, it also provides the model for how to live your life of consecration. At the Last Supper, when

Jesus instituted the Eucharist, there are four verbs used to describe the action of what He did as He gave us this great gift: "*Et manducantibus illis, accepit Iesus panem et benedicens fregit et dedit eis*" – "And as they were eating, He took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them" (Mark 14:22). These four actions can be a fruitful source of meditation, not just on what Jesus did then, but what He continues to do in and through you who are united so closely to this mystery, and so I would like to offer a few reflections on each of these actions.

First of all, Jesus took the bread. This action of being taken by the Lord should serve as a reminder of the fact that the Lord has taken you from out of the world, to be set aside for a special purpose, to be used by Him for His sacred purposes. Any call to a religious vocation must keep in mind the words of Jesus to His disciples in St. John's Gospel: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:16). The Greek word used for "chose" can also be translated as "being elected," but this election is not how we have come to understand that term in our society. There is no campaigning, no debates, no vote requiring a majority. Rather, God alone is the one who does the election through His Son Jesus.

Today, you rejoice in the gift of being taken, of being chosen, being elected, by Jesus, to live in closer union with Him, a union which will continue to deepen through the love communicated through the Eucharist.

Second, Jesus blessed the bread. When He took the bread, He did not leave it as it was. His blessing transformed it into His very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Such has been His work in you as well, Brother Joseph. Having taken you from the world to enter this community, He has not left you unchanged. Rather, through His many blessings, He has molded you and shaped you into a more perfect reflection of His love. Perhaps it is not always easy to see those blessings, for we tend to focus on the less perfect parts of our lives, those places in our lives – visible and invisible – that remain unfinished. But you can have great faith in knowing that despite these imperfections, the Lord has blessed you generously during your years of formation. With all humility, you acknowledge that there will always be more work to do in your life, and when that awareness comes, do not be discouraged, but rather bring those unfinished areas of your heart to Him in the Eucharist, placing them on the paten, so that as the

Holy Spirit blesses and transforms the bread and wine, so too will you continue to be transformed, so as to “bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16).

Third, Jesus broke the bread. There was a practical reason for this action, to ensure that all of His disciples could share in the gift of the Eucharist. On a spiritual level, however, the breaking of the bread can signify how we have to be broken, so that the gift of Christ’s love in us can be shared more generously to more and more souls. There have doubtless been times during your time with this community where you have felt that you have been broken, as you have navigated the many challenges of forming a new community, moving from one diocese to another, encountering various setbacks along the way. Those moments can be painful, leaving you to feel broken. Yet, the Lord has not been far from you in those experiences, and has indeed used those times of brokenness to better prepare you for living this vocation with greater fidelity. We do not always see how that brokenness is at the service of something greater, but in faith we accept the truth of which St. Paul reminds us: “We believe that all things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes” (Rom 8:28).

Finally, Jesus gave the bread. Jesus does not simply give His Apostles physical bread to nourish their hunger. He gives them His very life to satisfy all of their desires. The following day, Jesus gave Himself totally on the Cross. With His hands spread out, they reveal that they are empty, showing that He has given *everything* out of love for them, and indeed for all mankind. The Eucharist that you receive each day is the fruit of that love, and in your receiving this great gift, Jesus's words: "Do this in memory of me" is a command not just to re-present the Last Supper in the Mass, but to live that total gift of self, made possible because of His gift in the Eucharist.

Brother Joseph, on this day in which your election to the Lord is made more permanent, may you be filled with gratitude for the many ways in which He has blessed you, leading you to this place, and with trust in His Providence, surrender yourself to the many blessings He still has in store for you. When you feel broken by the weight of your imperfections or the demands related to community life, trust that the Father knows what He is about and how, in His Providence, these places of brokenness will become places of blessing not just for you, but for others.

Finally, pray that through the grace of the Eucharist you will receive each day, you will be more willing to be given in imitation of the one who has given everything.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹Pope St. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §95.