

**Homily for the Ordination of
Alex M. McCullough, Daniel G. McGrath,
Troy P. Niemerg, Bruce E. Scott, and Jayke A. White
to the Sacred Order of the Priesthood**

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

May 25, 2024

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

My dear brother priests and deacons, beloved consecrated women and men religious, family members and friends of our *ordinandi*, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is *good* for us to be here with you and with Our Lord on this glorious day in the month of May, dedicated to Mary, Mother of Our Lord and Mother of the Church, to witness and celebrate the ordination of five Deacons to Christ's priesthood: Alex McCullough, Daniel McGrath, Troy Niemerg, Bruce Scott, and Jayke White.

In his *Prayers Before the Eucharist*, Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote:

God has created all things for good, all things for their greatest good, everything for its own good. What is the good of one is not the good of another, what makes one man happy would make another unhappy. God has determined, unless I interfere with His plan, that I should reach what is my greatest

happiness. He looks at me individually, He calls me by name. He knows what I can do, what I can best be, what is my greatest happiness, and He means to give it to me.¹

Although we priests all share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ, we each retain our unique and distinct backgrounds, personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and gifts that we bring with us in our ministry, so I will start by telling you about each of our *ordinandi*.

Alex McCullough is the son of Chris and Angie McCullough. His hometown is Mattoon, Illinois, and his home parish is Immaculate Conception Parish in Mattoon. 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. As a newly ordained priest, he is most looking forward to celebrating the Sacraments for the People of God. His first assignment will be as Parochial Vicar at Christ the King Parish in Springfield.

Daniel McGrath is the son of Mark and Catherine McGrath. He is the first of eight children. His hometown is Thayer, Illinois, and his home parish is Sacred Heart Parish in Virden. He attended Sacred Heart-Griffin High School here in Springfield. He first discerned his vocation at Eastern Illinois University where he met a small group of men who were discerning the priesthood. 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. As a newly ordained priest, he is most looking forward to celebrating Mass and hearing confessions. He is also looking forward to starting his first assignment as Parochial Vicar here at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and as Associate Chaplain at his *alma mater*, Sacred Heart-Griffin High School.

Troy Niemerg is the son of Duane and Annette Niemerg. He has four siblings and says that he and his twin brother are the youngest, but his brother was technically born first so Troy is the youngest of them all. His hometown is Dieterich, Illinois, and his home parish is St. Isidore the Farmer Parish in Dieterich. He attended Dieterich High School, Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and Marian University in Indianapolis, and the Pontifical

North American College in Rome. Troy joins the increasing number of priests in our diocese who has a twin sibling. Our Director of Vocations, Father Brian Alford, and our Promoter of Vocations, Father Dominic Rankin, both have twin sisters, so I am beginning to suspect that one of the qualities that they are looking for in prospective seminarians is whether they are from a set of twins! Father Niemerg will return to Rome for one year to complete his Licentiate in Sacred Theology degree in Systematic Theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (*The Angelicum*), with residence at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

Bruce Scott was born in Paris – that would be Paris, Illinois, not France! He is the son of Richard and the late Mary Beth Scott, and has two siblings, of which he is the eldest. He attended Paris Community High School and Holy Redeemer College. He worked for over 20 years as an EMT/paramedic at a local hospital and has also done factory work, home health and other odd jobs. While he was married, he applied to the permanent diaconate program in 2014, however his wife, Joy, died in September of 2016 after a long illness. He says that “after a long journey through grief and discernment,” he was ordained a permanent deacon on June 26, 2021. The formation team and I as his bishop suggested that he think and pray about

becoming a priest, and he agreed to discern that call at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. He enjoys fishing and spending time with his children and grandchildren. As a newly ordained priest, he is most looking forward to finding the needs of the People of God and see how God provides through the Sacraments. Father Scott will serve his first assignment as Parochial Vicar at Saint Francis Solanus Parish in Quincy.

Jayke White is the son of Tami and Leon White. His hometown is Glen Carbon, Illinois, and his home parish is Saint Mary Parish in Edwardsville. He has two siblings, of which he is the eldest. He attended Edwardsville High School, Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and Marian University in Indianapolis, and St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. A unique fact about Jayke is that he spent a year working as a telemarketer for a cemetery. I suppose that experience will help prepare him for celebrating funerals! As a newly ordained priest, he is most looking forward to providing the sacraments to the people of God. His first assignment will be as Parochial Vicar at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Effingham.

I note that all five of our *ordinandi* this year were born and raised in our diocese here in Central Illinois, and so I commend their home parishes for helping to foster their vocations to the priesthood. I pray that all of our

parishes will be places that provide a conducive spiritual atmosphere for young people to discern a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

The readings for today's ordination chosen by our *ordinandi* emphasize the truth that they have been chosen by Our Lord to be His priests. Most of us remember being asked when we were children, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" As we grow more mature in our faith and in our relationship with Our Lord, we realize that the question of our vocation in life is not so much what *I* want to do as much as discerning what *God* is calling me to do with my life.

In our first reading today, the Lord tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." When Jeremiah objected that he was too young and did not know how to speak, the Lord answered him, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jeremiah 1:4-9).

Four of our *ordinandi* are in their twenties. Do not say, "I am too young." The other is 61. Do not say, "I am too old." Regardless of your age, it is the Lord who sends you and commands you to speak His name.

Our second reading, from Saint Paul's First Letter to Timothy, should be kept in mind by those older parishioners who might wonder what a young priest might have to say to them. Saint Paul says, "Let no one have contempt for your youth," for they will have received a gift from God conferred on them "through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate." Regardless of our age, priests are to "set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity." You are called to be "diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone. Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you" (I Timothy 4:12-16).

In today's Gospel passage from Saint John, Jesus calls His disciples friends and reminds them, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you" (John 15:9-17).

To be chosen for a task may be considered a burden, a privilege, or both. My favorite work of fiction is J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. I read it for the first time when I was in law school after one of my classmates highly recommended it. I probably should have been reading

legal cases instead, but I found the imagination of Tolkien's fantasy world captivating and enthralling. Years later when I heard the books were being made into movies, I read them again.

There is a highly relevant and significant scene in the story when Frodo is wondering why he has been entrusted with the mysterious and powerful ring. Frodo asks Gandalf: "Why was I chosen for this perilous quest?" Gandalf responds, "Such questions cannot be answered. You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have." Then Gandalf added: "That may be an encouraging thought."

My dear spiritual sons, Alex, Daniel, Troy, Bruce, and Jayke: If you are wondering, "Why was I chosen to be a priest?" Gandalf's response fits here too: "Such questions cannot be answered. You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have." The encouraging thought that I would add is this: The strength and heart and wits you have are gifts of God and are

guided by His grace. You are not in this alone. It is God who has begun the good work in you, and He will bring it to fulfillment.

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,

Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.²

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Prayers Before the Eucharist* (Gastonia, North Carolina: TAN Books, 2019), 2..

² "The Summons," lyrics by John L. Bell; music by David Peacock (Glasgow, Scotland: Iona Community, 1987).