

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
ORDINATION
ST. HUGO OF THE HILLS PARISH
MAY 18, 2002

**Readings: Isaiah 61:1-3 (in French); Responsorial Psalm 116:12-13, 17-19 (in Spanish);
Hebrews 5:1-10; John 15:9-17**

My dear Ordinands – Steve, Mike, Jaime, Brian, Tom, and Janvier:

In the name of the Church of Detroit, I thank you for your courage in choosing to step forward for ordination to the ministerial priesthood at this time in the life of the Church in our country. Obviously, you are motivated by a deep love for the Lord and His Church, a love you have experienced in the quiet of your own hearts and from witnessing your parents' fidelity in their marriages, and because of the example and fraternity of brother priests. Responding to the Lord's call has never been easy but the Lord always gives us the grace and strength we need if we are open to Him and the many gifts and blessings He is ready to offer us at every moment of the journey. As today's Gospel beautifully proclaims, ultimately, it is not you who are making the choice but rather, you have been chosen by the Lord. And so, in the name of the Church of Detroit, I accept the pledge and promise of your lives for the service of the Church in communion with Christ the one, true and eternal High Priest.

From the current challenges that our Church has been facing, we come to a new and richer appreciation of the mystery of the ordained priesthood. Now more than ever, it is clear that priestly ministry must flow from the very depths of our being. It is not simply a series of functions that we perform for the sake of the Christian faithful. Rather, as priests, we must consecrate to the Lord every aspect of our person as we live chastely, with simplicity and detachment, and in a spirit of obedience and openness to all that will be asked of us.

The formation process has helped prepare you for this day and hour, and I know you are grateful for all those who have taught and formed you in the ways of theology, spirituality, and ministry. But now, even once you are ordained, you will still need to be open to accountability before God and the Church on every level in the way that you use your time and talents, and in the way you give of yourselves without reserve as servants acting in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church.

Through the laying on of hands and the prayer of priestly consecration, *like* Christ and *with* Christ, you will be set apart for a three-fold ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the Holy Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church, and shepherding the Christian community in unity and peace so that it will be an effective and compelling sign of the Lord's saving grace for all people.

As taught by the Council Fathers of Vatican II and as recently as this past week by our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, by your ordination and vocation as priests of the New Testament, you are truly set apart; as priests, we are called to be witnesses to a whole set of values which are different than those of this world. But at the same time, we can never be strangers to the joys and sorrows of those that we serve; as good shepherds, we must truly know our sheep, understand them, and love them. Certainly this is part of the timeless message given in today's second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews as the author states that priests must deal patiently with sinners, for we ourselves cannot help but be aware of our own human weakness. During these days as we have witnessed sins and failings – yes, even crimes – committed by priests, now more than ever, we are challenged to recognize our call to holiness in and through our priestly vocation, a holiness that must complement the call of all other Christians to holiness according to their own state in life. Everything about our priestly lives must proclaim but one thing – the love

of Jesus Christ so that we will help married couples, single people, and consecrated religious to live their own vocations. As priests, we pray *for* them but also *with* them, even as they pray for us and with us; we need each other to live the Gospel in all its richness and full depth of meaning.

As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, no one of us dares to take on priestly ministry on our own initiative; we must be called to this service and we will be able to continue only because of the sustaining power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is significant that you are being ordained on the vigil of Pentecost; may you always remember your utter dependence on the Lord through a life of constant contemplative communion with Him. May you also remember that the Holy Spirit being poured out upon you is also being given at all times to the whole Church – to your brother priests and the order of bishops, and also to the very people that you are privileged to serve. As the Lord Himself reminds us in today’s Gospel, we are truly called to friendship – with Him and with our brother priests, as well as those that we serve. Our ministry will be fruitful and effective to the extent that it truly manifests the divine communion of life and love in genuine reciprocity, constantly giving and receiving in humble, grateful love.

As Isaiah reminds us in today’s first reading, you are about to be anointed with the “oil of gladness” so that you might bring glad tidings to those who mourn. The gifts of the Lord showered upon you are never for your own use but always for the building up of the Church so that it might better be a sacrament of salvation for all people. And so it is, given the needs of the Church and world today, your ministry will need to be especially focused on reconciliation, healing, and renewal, gifts of the Spirit which will flow from your words and deeds to the extent you yourselves are open each day to ever-new levels of conversion. Even as you stand at the

Lord's altar, you must be ready to so unite yourself with Christ's self-sacrifice that you truly renew your priestly consecration each day. In that way, you will become ministers of the new evangelization, preaching and teaching the Lord's Word, working for greater justice in every strata of society, with a particular love for the poor, , the needy, and the marginalized.

The priesthood to which you are being ordained is a gift that stretches back through the centuries to the Lord Jesus and the original apostles; the ordained priesthood is "apostolic and Catholic, or worldwide." As the Council Fathers of Vatican II remind us, "*The spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited and narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation 'even to the very ends of the earth.'* ...*Let priests remember, then, that they must have at heart the care of all the churches...*" So it is, that in today's ordination ceremony we heard the first reading proclaimed in French and the responsorial psalm in Spanish. In the Church of this new millennium, now more than ever, it is critically important that as good shepherd, you will be concerned about the needs of *all* members of the flock, especially those whose gifts might come from a different race or ethnic origin. May you always remember that every person – no matter how apparently weak, fragile, or limited – has something to give and that everyone of us – no matter how gifted – has something to receive.

As Christ gave Himself in the Holy Eucharist as "the priest, the altar, and the lamb of sacrifice," you must be ready to so enter into the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice that you let yourselves be changed and renewed each day as you lay down your lives for those that you serve. You will only be able to nourish and heal others in word and deed to the extent that your life is nourished and renewed each day at the Lord's altar and healed and strengthened on a regular basis through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will be able to proclaim the Gospel

of healing and hope to the extent that you yourselves are constantly ready and willing to undergo ever-new conversion.

On this day, we pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit – upon the six of you, upon our Church here in Detroit and, indeed, our Church throughout the world. Even though these are challenging hours for our Church, we also know that at times like these, more than ever, we can recognize the consoling and abiding presence of the Spirit of Truth, the Advocate Christ has promised. May you always live the full truth of your Christian dignity and your priestly commitment.

Finally, may I offer a word of thanks to your parents and families who have supported you in your decision and all along the way to the Lord's altar today. I pray that you will continue to sustain each other by your mutual support and witness. We also thank Monsignor Tocco and all the staff and parishioners of St. Hugo's for their gracious hospitality in providing a perfect setting for today's celebration which is truly a moment of renewing grace and joy for our whole Church, the dawning of a new Pentecost of healing and hope!

May God, who has begun the good work in each one of us, bring it to completion as we all strive to live more fully our call to holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Alleluia.