

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
JUNE 8, 2006

Readings: Revelations 21:1-5; Ephesians 4:11-16; John 17:20-26

Your Eminences, Cardinal Szoka, Cardinal Egan, Cardinal George, and Cardinal O'Malley; my brother Bishops and fellow Priests, Deacons, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese, Metropolitan Nicholas, Representatives of the Civic and Interfaith Communities, Family and Friends All:

I thank you for joining me today as I give thanks to God for the gift and mystery of 50 years of priestly service. Your presence here today allows me the opportunity to thank each of you for the support and love you have shown me here in Detroit, in Green Bay, and in my native Pittsburgh. My joy and gratitude this day are all the richer because of you. I am especially touched that many of you have traveled a considerable distance to be here. In particular, I wish to acknowledge my predecessor here in Detroit, Edmund Cardinal Szoka, who came all the way from Rome. In the name of all of us, I thank him for his nine years of service as Archbishop of Detroit and his sixteen years of ministry in the Vatican.

We are blessed today by many bishops from around the country, and indeed, from various parts of the world. Well aware of the many demands on your schedules, I truly appreciate the honor that you do me and the Church of Detroit. Your presence reminds us in a very visible way of our communion with our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, and the Church Universal.

I also wish to recognize friends and fellow leaders of the metropolitan area who have worked closely with me on many civic and religious efforts during the last sixteen years. Together we have strengthened the moral fiber of our community, as we have affirmed the dignity of every human life and promoted quality education for all.

Today's celebration provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the providential way God brings our lives together and uses each of us to build up the Body of Christ, the Church, the theme of St. Paul in today's second reading from Ephesians 4. As we reflect this day on the ministerial priesthood, I am hopeful every one of us will be renewed and strengthened in our

own particular calling, confident that God is using us for His glory, the good of the Church, and the spiritual renewal of our world.

In the providence of God, almost one-half of my priestly ministry has been exercised as a bishop—six years in Green Bay and sixteen years here in Detroit. At the time I was called to the fullness of the priesthood, in keeping with my baptismal name, I chose for my episcopal motto a line from Revelation 21 (today's first reading)—*Making All Things New*, or in the Latin, *Facere Omnia Nova*. I had in mind a spiritual renewal along the lines of Pope St. Pius X and his own motto, *Restoring all things in Christ*.

In many ways, the whole Christian life could be summarized as a daily return to our source, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, indeed, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending of all that we are and all that we do. We build up His Body, the Church, as we recognize and affirm the gifts of His Spirit and give thanks and praise to God for the many ways He challenges us and uses us.

From the example of my parents and through the formation process at Orchard Lake, Michigan, St. Vincent's in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore, and at the Lateran University in Rome, I came to understand firsthand the apostolic and Catholic nature of our Church. Grateful for my own Polish ethnic heritage and its millennial tradition of faith, I have also recognized the gift and blessing of the many different cultures through which the Gospel is proclaimed and lived. Over the years, participating in meetings of bishops and cardinals in our own country and in Rome, I have become ever more conscious of the way the Holy Spirit works through the diversity of the Church to sustain us in unity.

I thank God that a vital part of my priestly ministry over the years included service as both a canon lawyer and civil lawyer. Respecting and affirming the charisms of the Holy Spirit within the Church by means of our laws and structures, we also model and encourage the moral renewal of our society as well.

On this glorious day, countless memories flood my mind and heart. Who would have ever imagined a half-century ago when Bishop John Dearden ordained me at St. Paul's Cathedral in Pittsburgh, that each of us would end up here as Chief Shepherd of this local Church of Detroit? When Cardinal Mooney handed me my high school diploma at Orchard Lake Prep, could either of us have ever imagined I would build on all he had done, especially at St. John's in Plymouth? Never would I have expected the privilege and opportunity of being a Cardinal and

electing a pope. The ways of God's providence and the gifts of His grace are truly beyond measure. I am daily humbled by the way God uses us as His instruments, particularly as priests.

At the center of the vocation of priestly service is a desire and a willingness to let one's self be completely configured to Jesus Christ. Sharing in the consecration and mission of Jesus Christ, every priest willingly sets aside his own voice and freedom of lifestyle so that with all his mind and heart he can say with and for the Lord: "*This is my body... this is my blood...*"

The Holy Eucharist is truly the principle reason for the ordained priesthood. As our late Holy Father put it a number of times in his Holy Thursday letters, "*We priests are united in a singular and exceptional way to the Eucharist. In a certain way, we derive from it and exist for it.*" Through our prayerful celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we offer the best service that we could ever provide for the people of God.

Our service as priests and bishops not only flows from the Eucharist but is truly an extension of it. Our teaching and preaching, our every act of servant leadership is a further expression and amplification of what we say and do at the Table of the Lord each day. As we unite our joys and sorrows and those of our people to the Death-Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find the energy and motivation to hand over to others our gifts and talents, putting their needs ahead of our own. While every Christian is called to follow the path of Jesus, those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders have a unique, specific, and very essential service to offer: we represent Christ the Head of the Body, Christ the Servant of all.

The most important lesson I have learned over this half-century is simply this: every one of us has the gift and power of making all things new in Christ. We do so to the extent that we always focus on the gifts and the needs of the whole Body of Christ, the Church. Whatever gift we have received is not for ourselves, but for others. And in our every need, as we humbly and gratefully receive support and sustenance from others in the Church, we come to know and experience the healing, and renewing love of Jesus Christ, our true and eternal High Priest.

In today's Gospel, we hear the high priestly prayer of Jesus, a model for all Christian prayer and a challenging example for those of us who serve in His name. He proclaims that His own glory and joy come from knowing that He has handed on to His disciples the word and love of the Father. These reflections and insights of Jesus apply directly to our priestly ministry: we become holy and give God glory as we love all those confided to our care. Their support and

affirmation, in turn, consoles and renews us. Just as we are instruments of God for them, so, too, they are truly vessels of God's love back to us.

The giving and receiving of Christian life and ministry always has an outward thrust and focus—the mission of bringing Christ's presence to all the world, making all things new in Him, with Him, and through Him. Note that in today's section of John chapter 17, Jesus prays that one day the whole world might know and experience the gift of Christian love. And so, my homily ends with a challenge—to myself, all gathered here, and all people of good will. In a world overshadowed by much violence and daily assault on the dignity and mystery of the gift of life, as a Church, we need to make all things new as we engage in prayer and dialogue to advance the Kingdom of God.

By our example of Christian hospitality and loving support of the least of our brothers and sisters, we will be signs and voices of the larger, eternal divine-human dialogue of faith and love. We will make Christianity not only credible but attractive and compelling as we serve with love the immigrant and homeless, the unborn and the dying, the physically and mentally challenged. In particular, I pray that in the time still allotted to me, we can work together to heal our city and metro area of the sad legacy of racism. No matter our ethnic, religious, or racial background, as brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus, let us work together with the Holy Spirit to make all things new!

As I conclude these reflections on the Church in the world today and the gift and blessing of priestly ministry over the last half-century, my mind and heart take me back to our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, who was truly a model of priesthood for us all... a shepherd seeking to keep the flock united, healthy, and strong, a prophet of peace and justice. His every greeting proclaimed one simple message of hope: "*Praised be Jesus Christ!*" And we all answered him: "*Now and forever.*" I ask that you join me now in that dialogue of love and faith: "*Praised be Jesus Christ.*" (Response: "*Now and forever.*") Amen.