

**“For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes”**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

*September 29, 2014*

*Presbyteral Days Jubilarian Mass  
Basilica of St. James  
Jamestown, ND*

With the psalmist I can say this afternoon, “How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity.” Indeed, it is good and pleasant to be with all of you for these days that we will spend together, days of prayer, study, conversation, and hopefully joy in each other’s company. And today, especially, we rejoice in this opportunity to celebrate the ordination anniversaries of our brothers. It is a beautiful custom to remember these anniversaries and to celebrate the many years of priestly service that our brothers have offered to Christ and his Church. This year we honor Msgr. Alan Nilles and Fr. Claude Seeberger, who celebrate 65 years of priesthood. And close behind them are Msgr. Joseph Huebsch and Fr. Leo Stelten, who were ordained 64 years ago. Msgr. Joseph Senger celebrates 60 years as a priest, and Fr. James Jeffrey celebrates 55 years. Fr. Dale Kinzler, Fr. Jack Herron, and Fr. Julian Kupisz celebrate 40 years in the priesthood, and Fr. Frank Miller celebrates his 25<sup>th</sup> jubilee. And as a sort of “Johnny-come-lately,” your humble servant also celebrates 25 years this year.

Dag Hammerskold was the Secretary General of the United Nations during the 1950s until his death on a peace mission in Africa in 1961. He was known as a great humanitarian and a very spiritual man. He left a diary of personal reflections that was published after his death and called “Markings.” One of the entries in his diary says simply, “For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes.” For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes. Perhaps this captures a bit of what we feel as we celebrate these anniversaries. First, thanksgiving for what has been, for all that has been. This kind of thanksgiving requires a certain depth of faith, because it calls us to be thankful for everything, even the difficult and dark moments that we passed through.

How great is the blessing of the priesthood, a blessing that none of us could ever deserve. Surely in the years of priesthood that we celebrate, there has been much joy, much satisfaction. How could we not give thanks for the many celebrations of the Mass, the many penitents who have received forgiveness and healing from us in Reconciliation, the many hundreds, or even thousands that we have baptized into the life of the Trinity. Consider the children and adults we have instructed in the faith, the sick and the dying we have visited and anointed, the families we have consoled. And think too of the thousands of times we have been privileged to proclaim and preach the Word of God, the words of life.

It really is astonishing to consider how many people have been impacted by our lives, even just one of us. Christ has configured us to himself through priestly ordination so that his people might continue to experience his saving presence, so that they might continue to know his incarnation and his redemption in their own lives. We have been humble instruments, earthen vessels, through which Jesus continues to pour out his love, his grace, and his mercy. So, “for all that has been, thanks.”

Of course, there might have been difficult moments too. We all know that priesthood isn’t always a pleasant walk in the park. It has its ups and downs, as any way of life does. But in

the priesthood, we are asked, like the good shepherd, to lay down our lives for the sheep. We are asked, like Jesus, to lay down our lives for our friends. We struggle with our own human frailties and limitations, and the frailties of those around us too. There is a very real dying to self that must happen in the priesthood. And so, over these many years, whether it's been one year or sixty, each of us has had to die a little bit more so that Christ might live more fully in us. But for these moments too, we must give thanks. Often, it is through our own suffering and dying that Christ accomplishes his greatest work. And why should we be surprised? Where do we find Christ the High Priest but on the altar of the cross, offering the greatest sacrifice of all. So, for all that has been, thanks. Thanks even for those difficult moments during these 25, 40, 50, or 60 years.

“And for all that will be, yes.” This is the corollary. Here again, the priest is called to faith. He is called to let go of his own life so that he might live the life of Christ within him. The priest is conformed to the heart of Christ, who was in all things obedient to his Father. And that obedience must characterize our lives as well. The obedience which we promised, in imitation of our Savior, allows us to go freely where we are needed, to float lightly on the will of God, to be, as Hildegard called herself, “a feather on the breath of God.” You might call this the charism of availability. This openness to whatever God asks of us requires trust, but it is one of the most freeing aspects of our priestly calling. Rather than trying to control and determine all that will happen in our lives, we place ourselves freely into God's loving hands, and we allow him to do with us as he wills. “Not my will, but your will be done.” “For all that will be, yes.”

It's hardly an overstatement to say that we're living in interesting times. We, as priests, are facing challenges that might give us pause. For a whole host of reasons, the priest is no longer universally revered as he once might have been, but then neither were the apostles, so we shouldn't be surprised. And yet, we aren't ordained to enjoy personal popularity, but to make Christ known and to share with others his saving grace. Even the freedom of religion, which once we could take for granted in our nation, is now challenged, even assaulted, and our prerogatives may be even more limited in the future. But once again, the apostles too were constrained by the culture in which they lived, and by the grace of God they still were able to set the world on fire through the Gospel. So, this is the milieu in which our Lord has placed us, and in these concrete circumstances of our time, he asks us to go forth as his priests, his shepherds, who are willing to lay down our lives for the sheep, in whatever way that might entail. “For all that will be, yes.”

My brothers, today in the liturgy the Church celebrates the Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael, the great messengers and agents of God's plan of salvation for his people. As priests, we certainly are not angels. We are only men, but we are men who are called through the love of God to offer his mercy, his healing, and his power to a waiting world. Like the angels, let us go where we are sent and continue to be his instruments and agents of mercy, healing and power in the world. And taking our cue from Pope Francis, let us live joyfully in the Gospel, let us live as joyful messengers and servants of Jesus Christ for all the world to see. And with priestly hearts, let us say to Jesus and to each other, “For all that will be, yes.”