

Candidacy: A new path toward priesthood and re-evangelization

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

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*18th Friday in Ordinary Time
Rite of Admission to Candidacy
St. Cecilia Catholic Church
Harvey, ND*

Two days ago, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration, and we heard Peter say to Jesus: “Lord, how good it is that we are here.” He rejoiced in the company of Christ and his brothers, and I think we can say much the same thing today: “Lord, how good it is that we are here.” It is a joy for me to be with all of you, who are spiritual sons, but also brothers in the great family of Christ.

And today, the Church honors another saint who rejoiced in the Lord, St. Dominic. I was taught by the Dominican fathers, so I had a wonderful opportunity to learn from them and to learn about their founder. Dominic came on the scene at the turn of the thirteenth century, a time of great challenges for the Church, but also a time of great opportunity. Along with St. Francis, he began a period of renewal in the Church that continues to bear fruit even in our own time. The Church suffered many afflictions: heresies, mediocrity among the clergy, and a general drift among the faithful. But Dominic stepped forward into this scene and threw himself into the work of preaching, especially in those places where the faith was undermined by heresy. Dominic’s basic pattern of life was simple: apostolic life and activity which flowed from contemplation. By immersing himself in prayer and contemplating the riches of the Sacred Scriptures, Dominic was formed into an instrument of grace and conversion for thousands. By his preaching and the holiness of his life, he led countless souls back to the Church, souls that otherwise would have been lost to the heresies of the time.

And today, as we remember this great man of God, we also celebrate the Rite of Admission to Candidacy of our brother, who likewise wishes to make himself an instrument for the work of the Lord. There are two aspects to this celebration, this Rite of Admission to Candidacy. First is your own affirmation that you are prepared to go forward, that you are ready to make that further step toward the ultimate end of ordination to Holy Orders. For some time now, you have been engaged in seminary formation, studying philosophy and the other humanities, growing in personal maturity, and most importantly, deepening your relationship with God. It has been a kind of propaedeutic experience, a time of preparation, an introduction to the vocation to the priesthood, and you have come very far along the path.

But now, you step forward in a more deliberate way. Now you affirm before God and the Church that you wish to commit yourself even more firmly to this journey of formation, this path that leads to the priesthood. In a way, you are embracing the very words of our Lord in the Gospel, who tells us: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my

sake will find it.” You are indeed choosing to follow Jesus more closely, even to the point of denying yourself and accepting the cross that he offers you. But like all those who have gone before you, in this act of commitment, this personal “yes” to the next phase of your formation, you will discover what our Lord promised: in losing ourselves for him, we truly find ourselves, the self that God has made us to be. You will be clothed in the grace of our Lord, the grace that will enable you to accept the crosses and challenges of your calling while also discovering the great joy that comes with being a servant of Christ and his Church.

But this brings us to a second dimension of this Admission to Candidacy. Not only do you affirm your willingness and readiness to step forward and continue on the way to Holy Orders, but the Church also makes a similar affirmation. It is one thing for an individual to put himself forward for sacred service in the Church, but the Church must also recognize and give approbation to that service. And that she does today in this Rite of Admission. With great love and deep gratitude, the Church embraces you once again and seconds your desire to continue along this way that the Lord has placed before you. And just as you commit yourself more deliberately to your formation, so too does the Church commit herself even more fervently to support and accompany you along the way with prayer and guidance. And as your bishop, it is my privilege to speak for the Church in accepting your “yes” to the Lord.

Of course, there is much work yet to be done. Even now, you are preparing to begin your theological studies, a whole new chapter in the work of formation that has been happening for the last several years. There is much yet to learn, and I have no doubt that God will embrace you even more intensely as his chosen servant and his son. So, far from coasting to the finish line, now you must enter even more diligently into the work of formation, with all its crosses and forms of self-denial. But once again, in losing yourself for the Lord, you will in fact find yourself, your true self. And in that you will find great joy.

Pope Francis and his predecessors, Pope Benedict and Pope St. John Paul II have set us on the path of a new evangelization, a new era of evangelizing our culture, reintroducing the people of our times to the joy of a life in Christ. St. Dominic had much the same task in his own time: renewing the faith where it had grown cold, and inviting people once again to know, love, and serve Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Now you too, my son, by your admission as a candidate for Holy Orders, must set out on a new path, a path that will lead you to the priesthood and to the work of re-evangelization in our once Christian culture. May Jesus strengthen you for this journey and continue to form you as his beloved disciple and friend.