

Sermon at the Ordination of Deacon Calvin Robinson to the Priesthood The 4th of November 2023

What does ordination actually mean?

It means to be “commissioned to fulfil a special task”. The Christian use of the word goes back two thousand years, when Jesus called His disciples, with the challenge: "Come, follow me! I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19f). Later, at the institution of the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday, the Twelve Apostles were instructed to celebrate the Eucharist: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). With this commission, the liturgical celebration of the Church began in Jesus' lifetime, and we heard it again in today's gospel that Jesus after His resurrection renewed the sending of the Apostles with the gift of the Holy Spirit saying: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, so I send you. Having said this, He breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit!" (John 20:21f).

Calling, instructing and empowering remain the fundamentals for serving Christ in his Church. These three elements are now being made present in this act of ordination, becoming tangible, visible and an audible reality.

Full of symbolic actions, the ordination liturgy testifies to the mission of the priests to proclaim the Gospel in the name of Christ and to gather the people of God. The external sign shows us that at the ordination Jesus Christ himself is the minister of the sacrament. As with the first disciples, every priest is personally called to be with Jesus Christ and is sent by Him (Mk 3:13) .

Dear Faithful!

This means that Calvin through the rite of ordination today is empowered through symbolic acts of the ordination service to the ministry as priest with liturgical signs pointing to the invisible reality in which we take part. The ritual refers to spiritual contexts of meaning. Jesus' mission in His own days is seen today «by the eyes of the heart» – to use St. Augustine's expression.

The spiritual continuity in the act of ordination is also expressed in the Litany of the Saints. We pray for the intercession of the Apostles and Saints making the generations who witnessed in earlier ages, present with us now. The prostration of the new priest during these prayers is an expression of his surrender to service for Christ, and to walk with the Saints. With all participants in the service remaining silent, the laying on of hands follows from the bishop, who himself stands in historical succession to the Apostles. Then follows the laying on of hands by his college of priests present.

Already in the New Testament, the laying on of hands is a visible sign of the sending out in the power of the Holy Spirit for service in the name of the Risen One (Acts 6:6, 13:1-3, 2 Tim 1:6). As a gift from God, the new priest receives authority in this way. Afterwards Calvin is anointed with the precious oil of chrism and given a chalice and paten and dressed in priestly garments. Finally, the priest and the bishop exchange the great Christian greetings of peace.

Through the ordination rite the priest is taken into apostolic service by Christ which begins as He sends him out to preach and live the gospel and gather the people of God at the altar.

Dear Calvin!

This means that Christ Himself empowers you and sends you. The act of consecration gives you mandate to act in the name of Christ. You will feel far too small for the task. The consolation is that you are not alone. Jesus says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt 11:30). This means that you are like the oxen yoked in a team and connected across your back to plough the Lord's furrow. Jesus promises to carry our burdens with us. When you are yoked together with the Lord, you can have confidence. As priests we are to hold on to Christ because Christ holds on to us. We are not alone with our challenges. Christ carries our burdens with Him. So let the Risen One be your strength and the Holy Spirit your power.

The basis and center of priestly existence is friendship with Jesus. In the beautiful "Farewell Discourses" of Jesus in the Gospel of St. John, He says to the apostles: "No longer do I call you servants. Rather, I have called you friends... You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." (John 15.15f).

What a friendship!

God bless you, Calvin!

Amen.

+ Roald Nikolai