

a sermon from ACTS 20:28:

On The Occasion of an Ordination

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I. AN OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: “Most Merciful JESUS, from Whom comes all that is good, increase Your Grace in men and women consecrated to Your service, that they may perform worthy works of Mercy; that all who see them may glorify The Father of Mercy, Who is in Heaven. Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the company of chosen ones in Your vineyard – upon the souls of Priests and Religious; and endow them with the strength of Your blessing.”¹

“For The Love of The Heart of Your Son, [our Lord JESUS CHRIST,] in which they are enfolded, impart to them Your power and light, that they may be able to guide others in The Way of salvation – and with one voice – sing praise to Your boundless Mercy for ages without end...”² In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

II. A SCRIPTURE VERSE – ACTS 20:28 – TAKE HEED THEREFORE!

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all The Flock, over the which The Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed The Church of GOD, which He hath purchased with His Own Blood!”³

III. A PROPOSITION FOR HOLY ORDERS

The ordination into Church office for Priests and Religious is a high and weighty calling of GOD The Father. For The Flock has been bought by The very precious Blood of GOD The Son. Go forth then to feed The Church by the power of GOD The Holy Ghost. Therefore, let those who are ordained serve faithfully in the fear of The Lord!

¹ 1, National shrine of The Divine Mercy, “Three O’Clock Hour Prayerbook,” prayer for Priests and Religious, “Second Day,” p 16.

² 1, Ibid. prayer for Priests and Religious, “Second Day,” p 16.

³ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

IV. INTRODUCTION

Let us begin by asking this question, the better to understand the answer: What does it mean “to be ordained” into Church office? As Webster says, it means “to invest with a ministerial function or... power; ...to establish or settle [a man] in the pastoral office, as to ordain a Minister of The Gospel” in The Church.⁴ It is those who are “set apart for an [holy] office” as Shepherds over The Church. So “JESUS ordained Twelve, that they should be with Him,” as recorded in The Gospels.⁵

So godly men are appointed into “Holy Orders, ...appointed to nourish The Church with The Word and Grace of GOD in The Name of CHRIST.”⁶ As The Catechism of The Catholic Church explains, the ordained Priesthood guarantees that it is not merely man, but actually “...CHRIST Who acts in The Word and Sacraments through The HOLY SPIRIT for The Church. The Saving Mission entrusted by The Father to His incarnate Son was committed to The Apostles, and through them, to their successors.” By properly ordained Apostolic authority, those entering Holy Orders in particular “...receive The Spirit of JESUS to act in His Name and in His Person.” Therefore, “The ordained Minister is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what The Apostles said and did and, through them, to The Words and Actions of CHRIST [Himself], The Source and Foundation of The Sacraments.”⁷

As Matthew Henry says here, it is GOD who calls the upright into the offices of His Church, for “They took not this honour to themselves, nor was it conferred upon them by any prince or potentate, but The Holy Ghost in them qualified them for, and enriched them to, this great undertaking, The Holy Ghost fell upon them... The Holy Ghost also directed those that chose, and called, and ordained, them to this work in answer to prayer.”⁸ So it is in The faithful Church today, even until The Lord’s return.

⁴ 3, Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, entry “ordain,” verb, p ORC-ORD, entry 1.

⁵ 3, Ibid., entry “ordain,” verb, p ORC-ORD, entry 4.

⁶ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1119, p 316-317. “The Sacraments of The Church.”

⁷ 4, Ibid., # 1120, p 317.

⁸ 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, ACTS 20, 17-35, “Paul’s Address to The Elders at Ephesus,” v. 28, IV., 1.

In ACTS 13:1-3 we find this record of the ordaining of certain gifted saints in The Apostolic Church, “Now there were in The Church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon... As they ministered to The Lord, and fasted, The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” in the service of The Church.⁹

We see that they were equipped with special spiritual gifts needful to The Church. They were well known in that local congregation as faithful servants of The Almighty. There were found to be already eager and engaged in the work of serving The Lord. The calling of these men was by The Spirit of GOD. And so there was a preparation time of fasting and prayer. And at the appropriate time, there was the Apostolic succession of the laying on of hands to bring these men into the holy offices of The Church. They were anointed and equipped by The HOLY SPIRIT and sent out to do the work to which they were called. As it was then, so it is to be today, until The Divine Master returns.

Such is the pattern, as Saint Cyprian says, “...GOD commands a Priest to be appointed in the presence of all the assembly. That is, He instructs and shows that the ordination of Priests should not be solemnized, except with the knowledge of the people standing near. Thereby, in the presence of the people, either the sins of the wicked will be disclosed, or the merits of the good will be declared...”¹⁰

V. THE HIGH AND WEIGHTY CALLING BY GOD THE FATHER

First, the ordination into Church office of Clergy and Religious is a high and weighty calling of GOD The Father. The Apostle Paul says in ACTS 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all The Flock, over the which The Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers...!”¹¹ Those in Clergy and Religious office, above all others, must take care not to let their own Christian way be tarnished or compromised, lest they also

⁹ 2, KJV, ACTS 13:1-3.

¹⁰ 6, Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs, “Ordination,” p 485, 1st entry. “Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.370.

¹¹ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

tarnish and compromise The Cross and The Church. Likewise, they must take care not to neglect the people of GOD, lest they be starved of GOD's righteousness, becoming infected with things of the world, making The Gospel's work in their lives of no effect!

He who is called to minister to the people of GOD in holy Church office shall answer to The Eternal One Who calls and places him into that place of authority. For GOD will examine them, not only for their own lives and souls, but also for the lives and souls of the sheep under their charge! As Matthew Henry says, "They must take heed to themselves in the first place, must have a very jealous eye upon all the motions of their own souls, and upon all they said and did, must walk circumspectly, and know how to behave themselves aright in The House of GOD... [For] Those are not likely to be skilful or faithful keepers of the vineyards of others that do not keep their own!"¹²

Henry says further, "Ministers must not only take heed to their own souls, but must have a constant regard to the souls of those who are under their charge, as shepherds have to their sheep, that they may receive no damage," that the sheep do not "...wander from the fold or be seized by the beasts of prey; that none of them be missing, or miscarry," by the neglect of the shepherd¹³ A fitting metaphor for The Shepherds of GOD's Sheep. There are wolves standing always outside The Church - of the world, the flesh and the devil - from which the Pastor must protect The Flock of GOD from. And there are wolves standing often even within The Church - abusive snipers, deluded deceivers and apostate heretics - from which the Pastor is equally called to protect The Flock of GOD from. And more often, the more dangerous are those wolves within!

So firstly, you Ministers must always "be on your guard against the dangers which beset you, and seek to discharge your duty with fidelity... " How so? Keep "to your own piety, opinions, and mode of life [in CHRIST]. This is the first duty of a Minister; for, without this, all his preaching and works will be vain... [For] Ministers are beset with peculiar dangers and temptations, and against them they should be on their

¹² 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, ACTS 20, 17-35, v. 28, IV., 2., (1.)

¹³ 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, ACTS 20, 17-35, v. 28, IV., 2., (2.)

guard. In addition to the temptations which they have in common with other men, they are exposed to those peculiar to their office— arising from flattery, and ambition, and despondency, and worldly- mindedness. And just in proportion to the importance of their office” will come the temptations necessary to dislodge the unfaithful Minister! ¹⁴

And so secondly, you Ministers must always be on guard against the dangers which beset The Church, for GOD has placed her in your charge, that you “take care to “instruct, teach and guide” her; to guard her “from enemies external and internal; to make her your sole and special object of care.” How so? By taking heed to all The Flock, “the rich and the poor, the bond and the free, the old and the young. ...not to pass by the poor because they are poor; and not to be afraid of the rich because they are rich. A shepherd regards the interest of the tenderest of the fold as much as the strongest; and a faithful Minister will seek to advance the interest of all [in CHRIST]. ...he should know all his people; should be acquainted, as far as possible, with their peculiar wants, character, and dangers, and should devote himself to their welfare as his first and main employment!” ¹⁵

VI. THE FLOCK BOUGHT BY THE VERY PRECIOUS BLOOD OF GOD THE SON

Second, The Flock – that is, The Church - has been bought by The very precious Blood of GOD The Son. Saint Paul exhorts the ordained in ACTS 20:28 also because The Saviour JESUS CHRIST “...hath purchased with His Own Blood” the saints into His Kingdom at The Cross. ¹⁶ So The Eucharist, The Thanksgiving of The Holy Communion with The Lord and with one another, ¹⁷ is The Central Sacrament of the Christian life of The Church, to be lived out in Word and deed, received with reverence and awe by the people of GOD at the hands of the Priest, who stands in the place of The Lord Himself before The consecrated Elements of Bread and Wine!

¹⁴ 7, Barnes’ New Testament Notes, ACTS 20:28, p 1685. “Take heed therefore.”

¹⁵ 7, Ibid., ACTS 20:28, p 1685. “Take heed therefore.”

¹⁶ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

¹⁷ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1330, p 370. “The Memorial of The Lord’s Passion and Resurrection.”

The Eucharist is not a mere manmade memorial born of the imagination of mortals, but instituted by JESUS Himself at The Last Supper with His Apostles, of which Paul records in I CORINTHIANS 11:23-25, "...That The Lord JESUS the same night in which He was betrayed took Bread: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: This is My Body, Which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took The Cup, when he had supped, saying, This Cup is The New Testament in My Blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." ¹⁸ The Eucharist is to be received in humble reverence, as Saint Aquinas says:

“Down in adoration falling,
Lo! The Sacred Host we hail;
Lo! O’er ancient forms departing,
Newer rites of Grace prevail;
Faith for all defects supplying
Where the feeble senses fail!

To The everlasting Father,
And The Son Who reigns on High,
With The HOLY SPIRIT proceeding
Forth from each eternally,
By salvation, honor, blessing,
Might, and endless majesty! AMEN.” ¹⁹

As The Catechism of The Catholic Church instructs us, "...our Saviour instituted The Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood... in order to perpetuate The Sacrifice of The Cross throughout the ages, until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved Spouse, The Church, a memorial of His [Passion,] Death and Resurrection: a Sacrament of love, a Sign of unity, a Bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which CHRIST is consumed, the mind is filled with Grace, and a pledge of future Glory is given to us!" ²⁰ O CHRIST, great is Thy Mercy towards us, The Means by which Thou dost refresh us with Thy real Presence of The Most Holy Sacrament!

¹⁸ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 11:23-25.

¹⁹ 8, Catholic Family Prayer Book, p 68, "Tantum Ergo," Saint Thomas Aquinas. "Prayers Before Mass."

²⁰ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1323, p 368. "The Sacrament of The Eucharist."

So Paul adds this awesome caution before us in I CORINTHIANS 11:26-29, “For as often as ye eat This Bread, and drink This Cup, ye do shew The Lord's death till He come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat This Bread, and drink This Cup of The Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of The Body and Blood of The Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of That Bread, and Drink of That Cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning The Lord's Body!”²¹ Let each man examine himself indeed, and come not to The Lord's Table with known mortal sin over his soul, nor with conscious darkness in his heart, nor with awareness of rebellion in his mind!

For The Price paid by The Son of GOD to redeem His people was so very costly! Saint Paul reminds us of That Price paid by our Redeemer on our behalf in I CORINTHIANS 6:19-20, “What? know ye not that your body is The Temple of The Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of GOD, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a Price: therefore glorify GOD in your body, and in your spirit, which are GOD's!”²² The Creator of the universe does come down to man in The Bread and Wine when His Priests call upon His Name and pray The Words of Institution! Before The Presence of CHRIST all men should tremble and rejoice, most especially His Ministers!

GOD forbid then, that any Minister of The Lord should trample The precious Body and Blood of CHRIST under foot by being unfaithful to The Calling of The Spirit of GOD and mission of The faithful Church! Saint Paul warns of knowingly taking The Holy Eucharist in vain and under mortal sin. And if for the saints of GOD in CHRIST in the pews, how much more so the warning for those behind the pulpit?

²¹ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 11:26-29.

²² 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 6:19-20.

VII. FEED THE CHURCH BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST

Third, go forth then to feed The Church of GOD by the power of GOD The Holy Ghost. The ordained are equipped and empowered by The HOLY SPIRIT, as Paul says in ACTS 20:28, "...to feed The Church of GOD..."²³ The ordained clergyman then brings The Word and The Sacraments face to face to the people of CHRIST in His Body The Church Militant on earth, that they may be nourished, sustained and preserved for entrance into The Lord's Body in Heaven, The Church Triumphant! The Priest sits in The Seat of Moses before the people of GOD, but even more than this!²⁴ He stands in The Person of The Lord Himself, "In Persona CHRISTI," for the saints of GOD!²⁵

Matthew Henry says here to the Clergy, "They must feed The Church of GOD, must do all the parts of the Shepherd's office, must lead the Sheep of CHRIST into the green pastures, must lay meat before them, must do what they can to heal those that are distempered and have no appetite to their meat, must feed them with wholesome doctrine, with a tender evangelical discipline, and must see that nothing is wanting that is necessary in order to their being nourished up to eternal life. There is need of Pastors, not only to gather The Church of GOD by bringing in of those that are without, but to feed... [The Church of GOD] by building up those that are within!"²⁶

Only the Clergyman who is a humble and faithful servant of CHRIST may thus lead GOD's Sheep into His green pastures, beginning with reverent and earnest administration of The Liturgies of Word and Sacrament. If a man holding Church Orders is devoid of these things, he can do nothing else for GOD's people, but lead them astray! The clergyman must go in The Power of THE HOLY SPIRIT, beginning with his work to administer The Word of GOD and The Great Sacrament of Holy Communion with all reverence and fear. For if he fails faithfully to serve here, he will not succeed in serving as GOD's Minister anywhere elsewhere!

²³ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

²⁴ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 23:1-2, "Then spake JESUS to the multitude, and to His disciples, Saying, The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' Seat."

²⁵ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1566, p 436. "The Ordination of Priests – Co-Workers of The Bishops."

²⁶ 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, ACTS 20, 17-35, v. 28, IV., 2., (3.)

Albert Barnes concurs with Henry, observing The Command here of The Lord to Pastors is “to feed” The Church of GOD. “This word is properly applied to the care which a shepherd exercises over his flock... It applies not only to the act of feeding a flock, but also to that of protecting, guiding, and guarding it. It here denotes not merely the duty of properly instructing The Church, but also of governing it; of securing it from enemies... and of directing its affairs so as to promote its edification and peace.”²⁷ What does Paul say next in ACTS 20:29? “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing The Flock” of GOD!²⁸

By the anointing of The Spirit of GOD, duly appointed within Apostolic Succession, the clergyman is called to join the very Hosts of Heaven in serving The LORD and His people – bringing The Kingdom of GOD Above to meet The Kingdom of GOD in the Here and Now – in Word and Sacrament. So he joins with David as in PSALM 103:20-22, “Bless The LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His Commandments, hearkening unto The Voice of His Word. Bless ye The LORD, all ye His Hosts; ye Ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless The LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless The LORD, O my soul!”²⁹

VIII. THEREFORE SERVE FAITHFULLY IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

Therefore, let those who are ordained to be Priests and Religious serve faithfully in the fear of The Lord! And if for the laity, how much more for the Clergyman? Saint Peter marks the path for those who are called to this high and weighty office by The Almighty in I PETER 5:1-4, “I exhort [you], who am also an Elder, and a witness of the sufferings of CHRIST, and also a partaker of The Glory that shall be revealed: Feed The Flock of GOD which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over GOD's Heritage, but being ensamples to The Flock. And when The Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of Glory that fadeth not away!”³⁰

²⁷ 7, Barnes' New Testament Notes, ACTS 20:28, p 1686. “To feed.”

²⁸ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:29.

²⁹ 2, KJV, PSALM 103:20-22.

³⁰ 2, KJV, I PETER 5:1-4.

Woe then to the Shepherd who starves The Flock of GOD and feeds only himself, or who is asleep at his post when the wolves attack the Sheep of GOD, as The LORD warns through His prophet in EZEKIEL 34:2, “Son of man, prophesy against the Shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith The Lord GOD unto the Shepherds; Woe be to the Shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the Shepherds feed The Flocks” of GOD?³¹ Such a privilege and responsibility it is, to be an Overseer of The Pastures of The Eternal Good Shepherd, Who sets you in place in His Sheepfold to feed His people! GOD forbid that the Shepherds of The Church should ever be found to be like those unfaithful Shepherds of Israel!

As Henry says further, “They must watch, as shepherds keep watch over their flocks by night, must be awake and watchful, must not give way to spiritual sloth and slumber, but must stir up themselves to their business and closely attend it. Watch thou in all things..., watch against every thing that will be hurtful to The Flock [of GOD], and watch to every thing that will be advantageous to it; improve every opportunity of doing it a kindness.”³² For you answer to The Eternal Good Shepherd of our very souls!

So it is a weighty thing to be ordained into Church office as Priest or Religious! Hear this exhortation from The Almighty through His prophet in JEREMIAH 23:1-2, “Woe be unto the Pastors that destroy and scatter the Sheep of My Pasture! saith The LORD. Therefore thus saith The LORD GOD of Israel against the Pastors that feed My people; Ye have scattered My Flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith The LORD!”³³

John Wesley says to the Ordained and Religious in The Name of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, admonishing with these words, “‘Take heed therefore’ — I [The Lord, now transfer My care of and authority over My Body] ...upon you, [that you take all care as I command!]; first to yourselves; ‘then to The Flock over which The Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers’ — For no man, or number of men upon earth, can constitute an

³¹ 2, KJV, EZEKIEL 34:2.

³² 5, Matthew Henry Commentary, ACTS 20, 17-35, v. 28, IV., 2., (4.)

³³ 2, KJV, JEREMIAH 23:1-2.

Overseer, Bishop, or any other Christian Minister,” apart from The Spirit of GOD and due Apostolic anointing. “To do this is the peculiar work of The Holy Ghost: ‘to feed The Church of GOD’ — That is, the believing, loving, holy children of GOD; ‘which He hath purchased — How precious is it then in His sight! with His Own Blood’ — For it is The Blood of The only begotten Son of GOD!”³⁴ See then, O Ministers of The Word and Sacraments of GOD, that you walk before our Divine Master in righteousness and in truth to the charge that He now gives you all the days of your life!

IX. IN CONCLUSION

GOD forbid, then that any Clergyman should come to stand before The Lord and hear spoken of him by CHRIST on Judgement Day, as The Lord said of the unfaithful Shepherds of Israel in MATTHEW 23:2-4, “...The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' Seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers!”³⁵

Rather do as our Lord commands as faithful Shepherds of GOD's Flocks, that you may be judged worthy on That Day as JESUS declares in MATTHEW 23:11-12, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted!”³⁶ Let all who are ordained into holy Church Orders be found to be faithful and humble servants of The Cross! For ordination into Church office for Priests and Religious is a high and weighty calling of GOD The Father. For The Flock has been bought by The very precious Blood of GOD The Son. Go forth then to feed The Church of GOD by the power of GOD The Holy Ghost. Therefore, let those who are ordained serve faithfully in the fear of The Lord!

³⁴ 9, Wesley's Notes on The New Testament, ACTS 20:28, p 402. “Take heed therefore.”

³⁵ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 23:2-4.

³⁶ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 23:11-12

We then close with The Words of The Apostle Paul, recorded by Saint Luke in ACTS 20:28, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all The Flock, over the which The Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed The Church of GOD, which He hath purchased with His own Blood!”³⁷ May it ever be so with all who are ordained in The Church of CHRIST. In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

³⁷ 2, KJV, ACTS 20:28.

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