

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)

July 7, 2019

Isaiah 66:10–14C • Galatians 6:14–18 • Luke 10:1–12, 17–20

I.

On June 10, 2006, my family sat right over there,
as I was ordained a priest a few feet away.

I don't remember much from that day.

It was a blur, as a wedding is for those who are married.

I did have a sense that I would need the rest of my life
to unpack the meaning of the priesthood.

There are moments when I return to that day, to reflect on it.

One of them is today, as I begin my work as your parish priest.

I was thirty years old then, with no gray hair in sight.

Now I'm forty-three, with fourteen years of priestly service under my belt,
and gray hair steadily climbing up my temples.

Because I was ordained here, this church is a special place for me.

It's an honor for me to serve as the rector of this Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

II.

I would like to express my gratitude to the outgoing rector, Msgr. Patrick Golden,
for his ministry in the parish,
and for the kindness he has shown me during the transition period.

I've known Msgr. Golden for almost twenty-five years.

I first knew him as Fr. Patrick, when he was my priest for two years
when I was a student at the College of William and Mary.

III.

Returning to ordination,
this is what my classmates and I heard fourteen years ago in this church.

The bishop prayed that,

“By their preaching
and through the grace of the Holy Spirit
the words of the Gospel... [may] bear fruit in human hearts
and reach even to the ends of the earth.
May they be faithful stewards of your mysteries,
so that your people may be... nourished at your altar;
so that sinners may be reconciled
and the sick raised up.”

That prayer echoes Jesus’ commissioning of the seventy-two disciples
in today’s Gospel:

“Go on your way...
Whatever town you enter and they welcome you...
cure the sick in it and say to them,
‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’”

Christ’s mission is the mission of this parish and of every parish.

The priest’s job is to lead, to accompany,
and to support the community’s work of making God present in the world.

My goal is to be a good shepherd,
to facilitate the encounter of each parishioner with the person of Jesus Christ—
an experience that leads to mission.

We are sent after first having encountered the Lord ourselves.

We are disciples first, and then missionaries, as the Gospel tells us:

“At that time the Lord appointed seventy-two others
whom he sent ahead of him in pairs
to every town and place he intended to visit.”

So there are two vital forces at work in the Church: communion and mission.

Communion refers to our deep bond with the Lord and, through him, our bond to one another.

Mission designates the purpose of the Church, which is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus' Death and Resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins, to all people.

Communion keeps the Church intact; mission enables the Church to grow.

Our communion here has a special significance because this is a cathedral church.

The word "cathedral," as you may know, is derived from the bishop's "chair" (in Greek, *kathedra*).

That chair is not just a fancy piece of furniture; it's a symbol of the bishop's role of shepherding and teaching the entire flock entrusted to his care.

And this beautiful church building symbolizes the living Church that gathers within its hallowed walls: bishop, priests, deacons, and lay persons, who together form the Body of Christ.

When I told my dad that I was assigned to the cathedral, he asked me: "What's a rector, anyway?"

Like many Catholics, he had never heard of the word.

I explained to him that the cathedral is the bishop's church and that he is the pastor of this parish.

But because the bishop has responsibility for the whole diocese, a rector is appointed to help lead the parish.

The title of this cathedral is also significant.

The Sacred Heart is a beautiful expression of Christ and his saving work.

This Heart of God—the Sacred Heart of Jesus—embraces all people.

Each person becomes whom he or she is meant to be when their heart is joined to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In those immortal words of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD),
 “You have made us for yourself, O Lord,
 and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Christian life is about being joined to the heart of Christ and leading others to him.

And that happens, above all, in the circumstances of daily life.

Significantly, Jesus’ missionary enterprise is meant to occur within the home:

“Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’...
 Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you.”

With that in mind, I look forward to getting to know you in that setting.

I would be honored to come to your home if you would like to invite me to dinner.

As the Gospel demands, I will eat whatever you place in front of me!

IV.

On the day I was ordained a priest, I distributed a holy card, as is customary.

My card featured a passage from the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that has meant a lot to me, because it captures the “big picture” of our faith, our reason for being:

“[The Church] holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history.

The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever”
 (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 10).

That is what I seek to do here:

bear witness to Jesus Christ, whose Sacred Heart is our life.