

June 25, 2016 Saturday of 12th Week in Ordinary Time

Ordination to the Order of Deacon

Jeffrey David Hanley

Maximilian Jacob Nightingale

St. Augustine Cathedral 10:00 a.m. Diocese of Kalamazoo

(Scripture Readings: Numbers 3:5-9; Acts 6:1-7b; Lk.10:1-9)

Introduction: As we begin this solemn and joyful Mass of Ordination to the Order of Deacon, I ask you all to be seated for these brief expressions of greeting.

It is a great joy for me to welcome ALL of you here to our Cathedral on this beautiful and already-warm late June morning. I would also like to offer some particular expressions of welcome.

First of all, I am very pleased to welcome Bishop James Murray, the Bishop Emeritus of our Diocese: we are so grateful to you, Bishop Murray, for all that you have done, and continue to do for our Diocese.

I welcome all my brother priests and deacons who are here this morning in such great numbers, and in a special way our four newly-ordained priests who just a little more than a month ago were ordained Priests right here: Fr. Jose Haro, Fr. Bruno Okoli, Fr. Andrew Raczkowski and Fr. Paul Redmond. I welcome all those of our Clergy who are unable to be here due to parish responsibilities or other obligations. And a very warm welcome to visiting priests, deacons and seminarians who are here with us this morning.

I welcome Jeff and Max's Home pastors from St. Joseph Parish and Sts. John and Bernard Parish from over these years as they have grown up and entered the seminary, along with all the parishioners of those two parishes who are here this morning.

I want to welcome especially our two newest priests serving here in our Diocese: Father Vanathaiyan Savaramuthu, a member of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales who is preparing to begin his parish assignment here, along with Father Daniel Rodriguez Sigala who just arrived last evening from Mexico, also preparing to begin his first assignment here among us.

I also welcome all our Seminarians, who are serving here at the altar, and all those members of Consecrated Religious Life here with us this morning.

I am particularly happy to welcome all the relatives, family members and close friends of our two Candidates, and especially their immediate family members of Grandparents/Aunts-Uncles/Siblings and of course their Parents.

And most importantly of all, I welcome our Deacon Candidates, Jeffrey Hanley and Maximilian Nightingale, on this most important day of your lives so far---the day that the Church affirms with certainty that our Loving God has chosen you for ordained ministry through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

All of us, united together through our shared Faith----Welcome. Let us now stand.....Let us prepare ourselves to....

Homily:

“We choose these our brothers, for the Order of the Diaconate!”

We just heard that wonderful statement which I was privileged to declare on behalf of all of us. “We choose these our brothers...”-----We----all of us who have traveled here to St. Augustine Cathedral on this VERY warm June day; We----all of us---who have accompanied Jeff and Max along their life journey thus far as family members, friends, teachers, fellow parishioners, formators, parish priests and Bishops. We-----all of us who make up the Church----We choose these our brothers----for special, ordained service in the Church.

That’s why Msgr. Osborn, our Director of Vocations, stood before all of us and stated that after inquiry among the people and based on the recommendation of those responsible, Max and Jeff “have been found worthy” to be “chosen”.

And of course, Jeff and Max themselves are included when we talk about “We”----they aren’t passive participants---they haven’t been chosen against their will. Each of them have been hearing God’s Call to them for many, many years, and with the help of their families and those entrusted with formation in the Church, we are convinced that their choice and the Church’s choice are one and the same.

And so We----All of us----rejoice today, and we have just expressed that joy with thunderous applause. And that is fitting---it is right and just! It makes this June 25th a truly great day in the life of the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and the Church Universal.

But, of course, we said more than that in that important statement, didn't we? It *is* "We" who have chosen these our brothers, but we didn't do it in isolation. The first part of that statement is what is of critical importance: ***"Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose these our brothers...."***

We can, and we should, say that phrase before everything that we do, all our choices and decisions in life. But most especially, in these matters of making life decisions and vocational choices, while We definitely have an important---even essential---role to play, we first of all "rely" on the help of God, our Loving Father---His Son and the Word made Flesh, Jesus Christ---and the grace and guidance of their Holy Spirit Who guides the Church in all things. Only with God's help do the choices WE make have merit and make sense.

The "help" of God that we refer to isn't some afterthought. The "help" of God that we rely on in this matter of these two young men entering into Holy Orders is that God Himself has called you. It is God Who called you first, even from the moment of your conception; it is God Who has continued to call you into ordained service in His Church; and it is God Who will continue to call you throughout your life as a deacon and later as a priest for the remainder of your lives.

We heard in this morning's First Reading from the Book of Numbers that God, through Moses, made sure that His People on their Journey of Faith had the ministry of the Priests through Aaron and his family; He also made sure that the Priests had the help of those from the Tribe of Levi---the ones who foreshadowed the establishment of the Order of Deacons.

We heard about the actual establishment of the Diaconate in today's Second Reading in the very familiar passage from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. As the Apostles recognized that the needs of the early Christian community were expanding, the Apostles made the distinction between the Order of Deacons to be involved in the works of charity, liturgy and administration within the community, and the Order of Priests who focus on the teaching of the Faith and the preaching of the Good News of the Gospel. The very particular criterion for being a deacon was to be a *"reputable man, filled with the Spirit and wisdom."*

And of course that distinction goes back to Jesus Himself as we heard in today's Gospel passage. Jesus had already chosen the 12 Apostles, but in addition to their particular ministry, Jesus appointed an additional 72 disciples with special instructions to go to *"every town and place He intended to visit."* He told them to be focused on their mission and to proclaim the message: *"The kingdom of God is at hand for you."*

God has always provided for the spiritual well-being of his Holy People through the ministry of priests and deacons, those ordained----set apart----called forth from the People themselves to help bring them closer to God on their Journey of Faith.

It really is truly amazing to see how God does work in our very midst. Today, from across our entire Diocese of 59 parishes in nine counties, we are blessed with two Candidates for Diaconate, truly *"reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom"*. They both have been born and raised a few miles from one another in Berrien County; in fact, they were raised in home parishes across the river from one another, one in St. Joseph, St. Joseph and the other from Sts. John and Bernard in Benton Harbor. Jeff and Max have known each other, and been sharing their educational journey all along the way since their days in their High School Youth Group. They attended College together at St. Thomas Aquinas in California, they entered the seminary together at Sacred Heart in Detroit for their first year, and they've been studying Theology together at the North American College in Rome for these past three years, where they will return in the Fall until their Priesthood Ordination which, God willing, will be one year from now back here in this Cathedral----together.

But don't worry: I can assure you, Max and Jeff, your summer Deacon assignments, which I will give you right after Mass, are not together!

God does provide by calling and choosing men to be priests and deacons for His People, and it is very important that we continue to pray to God on this beautiful day for an increase of Vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life from every one of our 59 parishes and 28 collaboratives in each of the nine counties of our Diocese so that we can adequately provide for the spiritual care of God's Holy People here in our Diocese as we all continue on our Journey of Faith.

The “choice” that is made here today---the choice that God makes, the choice that WE make----and the choice that Max and Jeff make--- is life-changing.

Very shortly, Jeff and Max, I will ask you to make seven solemn promises---to be **consecrated** for the Church’s ministry, to give your lives in **humble charity**, to **pray constantly** for the needs of the Church and the world, to **conform your lives to Christ**, to **believe and teach what the Church believes and teaches**. In addition, you will make the solemn promise of **Celibacy** so that you can be a living sign to the world of the presence of the Kingdom of God which is “at hand” and in fact, which is here among us. And finally you will make the Promise of **Obedience** to me and my successors as you seek to do God’s will, not your own. These are truly life-changing promises!

And of course, the solemn laying on of hands completes the act of setting you apart----demonstrating that you truly are God’s chosen ones---chosen and ordained to bring Jesus to your people and to bring your people to Jesus.

Once more, we know that for you to be able to be faithful to your Solemn Promises, to give witness to the joy and freedom of a life of Celibacy and Obedience, you can not just do this on your own.

You need to ***call and rely on the help of God*** if you are going to be faithful to your Vocations and joyful as you live out your Vocations in our world that so desperately needs Jesus’ Good News.

How do you do that? Through the faithful praying of the Divine Office, the daily reception of the Eucharist, a strong devotion to our Blessed Mother, and regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially frequent Confession---these are the ways that God’s Help will truly be your strength.

Through your ministry of charity and service to the poor, in the example of Jesus Who showed us what it means to be truly great by washing the feet of His own disciples, you will be Christ’s love to those in need. As you baptize, witness marriages, preside at wakes and funerals, and lead people in prayer and devotion, you are serving the spiritual needs of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

My dear sons, you who are also my beloved brothers in the Lord, you are not alone. You are surrounded by all those here in this Cathedral who love you and support you. But even on those occasions when you find yourself alone, or *feel* alone, know that you are never truly alone. Remember always to keep “relying

on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ”, to call on the loving intercession of our dear Blessed Mother, and to be inspired by the communion of Saints who give you strength as you proclaim in your ministry, in your words and through your very lives the Good News of Jesus: *“The Kingdom of God is at hand for you”!*