

*Homily on the occasion of the ordination anniversaries (60+) of Assumptionists Oliver Blanchette, Theodore Fortier, Aidan Furlong, Roland Guilmain, Eugene LaPlante, Norman Meiklejohn, Gerard Messier and Camillus Thibault.*

The Gospel for today's feast of the Holy Trinity contains within it the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel, the Risen Lord sending the apostles out to all the world.

When you consider the places where these men have exercised their priesthood - In Mexico City, London, Moscow, Athens, New York City, Peru, the Congo, Quebec City, Boston, Worcester, and even Fiskdale ( I'm sure this is not an exhaustive list) - I'd say they have responded pretty well to that commission.

It's clear to me that people love their priests. Maybe it's better to say they love the priesthood, but priesthood does not exist in the abstract. It's always embodied in flesh and blood, this treasure carried in earthen vessels. So, maybe we can say, people love these particular men who have been faithful, over many years (count, all together, 512 years) to the high and humbling calling they have received. They are the ones who have given us Christ, not as functionaries but in their very persons. The priesthood has taken its lumps in recent years as a result of grievous and self-inflicted wounds, but, if I may say so, we still love our priests.

It is a peculiar calling, especially in the present context. It is not a vehicle for self-expression, but consists entirely in doing the bidding of another. Its clearest meaning is right here in today's Gospel**: Jesus gives his power to the apostles in such a way as to make their ministry a continuation of his own.** That's the amazing thing. "All power is given to me by my Father, go, therefore…" We are bidden to take responsibility for carrying on Christ's mission in the world.

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Our liturgical context today is fitting for the occasion, because the Trinitarian mystery is the foundation for understanding the nature of priesthood. Jesus is at the center. In the totality of his person, he is mission, and relation from the Father to the Father. There is an interesting parallel in John's Gospel, where in one place it says about Jesus: the Son can do nothing of his own accord, and another speaking to the twelve, he says, apart from me you can do nothing.

This "nothing" which the disciples share with Jesus expresses both the power and the personal dispossession that is characteristic of the priestly ministry. By themselves, by virtue of our own strength, we priests can do nothing of what we are asked to do. How could we, of our own accord, say "I forgive you of your sins," or "This is my body" or how could we lay our hands on another in blessing. None of those things is done by our own authority. But at the same time, this "nothing", this inability to do anything on our own, draws us into a community of mission with Jesus.

This ministry, in which we are able to give through the power of God something that we could not possibly give on our own, the Church calls a sacrament. In terms of the life of the priest, this means that the priest is not performing functions for which he is highly qualified by his own natural ability, nor is he doing the things that please him the most or that are most profitable. On the contrary, the one who receives the sacrament of ordination is sent to give what he cannot give of his own strength. He is sent to act in the person of another, to be the living instrument of

Jesus Christ. For this reason, no human being can declare himself a priest, and no community can promote someone to this ministry by its own willing it. Mission can only be received from the one who sends, from Christ in his sacrament, through which the priest becomes the voice and the hands of Christ in the world.

Perhaps in a particular way, religious priests, priests who vow themselves to Christ who is poor, chaste, and obedient, understand that this renunciation of self does not diminish our humanity, but rather leads us to the deepest kind of maturity. It does this by bringing alive the image in which we were created and recreated. Since we are created in the image of the Trinity, the one who loses himself will find himself.

And so, on this feast of the Trinity, we give thanks for these men, for Oliver, Ted, Aidan, Roland, Eugene, Norman, Camillus and Gerry, who have been called by the Father to continue the mission of his Son in the world and through the power of the Holy Spirit have remained faithful to that mission for 74, 65, 64, 62 and 60 years.

Let’s return next year to celebrate Oliver’s 75th!