

“God’s Revolution: The Way Up Is Down, The Way Out Is In”
Homily for Mass of Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate
Church of St. Pius X, Redwood City
Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2020

Introduction

We are certainly living in very eventful times. The very fact of our Mass today taking place with so many state-mandated legal restrictions is a sign of that. It certainly seems to be that we are living in a time of “revolution,” even in the etymological sense of the word, where everything is being “turned upside down.” It seems like the whole temporal order is being inverted. I think it is typical of such revolutions of the temporal order that most often one dominant group in society is simply exchanged for another, and often there is no real, meaningful, lasting change. With the “revolution of faith,” though, it is very different, and we heard the anthem of that “revolution of faith” proclaimed in the Gospel reading: Mary’s *Magnificat*.

Three-Fold Revolution

Indeed, Our Lady’s *Magnificat* is a “revolution” in the divine scheme of things. The Scripture commentator William Barkley sees in Mary’s *Magnificat* a three-fold “revolution.” First, Our Lady proclaims that God “has scattered the proud in their conceit.” Barkley says, “This was a *moral* revolution because true Christian faith is the death of pride.” The only path to know the love of Jesus Christ is the path of humility. That opens the way. And Christ’s love is the only thing of true and lasting value.

“He has cast down the mighty...and has lifted up the lowly.” This bespeaks *social* revolution where all are treated with equal dignity, where one’s dignity does not depend on one’s social status or prestige or how much wealth one has or how much power one can yield. Thus,

the Church throughout all our history has championed the dignity of every human person in every stage of life, in every condition of life, because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God.

“He has filled the hungry...and the rich he has sent away empty.” This bespeaks an *economic* revolution, Barkley says. In his words, “a non-Christian society is an acquisitive society where each one is out to amass as much as he can get. A Christian society is a society where no one dares to have too much while others have too little, where everyone must get only to give away.”

In the Life of the Deacon

My dear brothers to be ordained deacon today, you have received much. You have been given much, thanks to your formation and commitment to that formation. I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude, and that of the whole Archdiocese, to your professors and formators who have accompanied you on this path to where you are today. You have been given much in terms of your knowledge and understanding of the faith, in terms of your spiritual growth. You have been given that so that you can, in turn, give it away and enrich the lives of those who have not yet been given so much of the true treasures of life, the treasures that satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human soul and endure into eternity.

In this way, you will give God the first fruits of your labor, the fruits of your formation. You will give Him and are called to give Him the first fruits, not the leftovers. We give the first fruits in imitation of Christ Himself, as Saint Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Corinthians that we just heard proclaimed: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the *first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep.” So you give Him the first fruits. I know this has been drilled into you all

along and must continue to be your clear priorities: your first is family, second, job, and then diaconal ministry. Everything is very much peripheral to that. Your commitment to serving the Church as deacon is not a hobby, it is a vocation. God calls you to this Order. That vocation is underscored by the promises you will soon make, especially the promise of obedience with which you give up personal freedom regarding the circumstances of your ministry and activity in the Church in order to be freer to serve the wider local church under the direction of your Archbishop.

I see it as appropriate, then, that we are celebrating this Mass of your ordination to the Order of Deacon on this solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven. This was, as you know, supposed to be celebrated in our Cathedral, the mother church of our Archdiocese, on our Cathedral's feast day. But never second-guess God; He has taught me that lesson too many times. Today, we celebrate the mystery of Mary's glorification, and it is important to understand what that means from a Christian perspective, especially today on the day of your ordination. Your ordination is not a glorification; it is a call to follow the path of God's "revolution" as modeled in the life of our Blessed Mother and exemplified in her anthem of God's "revolution," the *Magnificat*. The slogan of her anthem could be, "The only way up is down; the only way out is in."

The Inversion of Human Logic

The medieval mind understood the vagaries of fortune in the temporal realm, that one might be at the top of the heap one moment and then be crushed at the bottom at another. This was portrayed in art and literature and even music. Those whom God exalts are the lowly. "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly." Is this not the

outstanding mark of the Office of Deacon: a servant, a public servant bound by promises to the Church and to the Bishop, who puts the needs of others before himself? This is the one who is pleasing in God's sight and at the top of the heap in God's kingdom. The lowly are exalted. The only way up is down.

How does one preserve this integrity of service? We heard about the "Woman clothed with the sun" in our reading from the Book of Revelation. When she was under attack from the devil after giving birth to God's Chosen One, the reading says, "The Woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God." The desert is a place of solitude. It is a shelter from the attacks of the evil one, although there is also a sense of it being a place of testing. We need to seek this shelter of solitude – the intimacy of prayer – in order to be purified of temptations to complacency, selfishness, and self-glorification. In this, you are modeling Our Lord himself, Who modeled prayer for us, and He always prayed before major moments in His public ministry. We can think of the forty days He spent precisely in the desert before He began his public ministry. He was alone in prayer before He called His Apostles, and, of course, He prayed in the garden the night before He died. Life can often feel like a rat race, and Church life and ministry is no escape from that. One cannot find peace in the midst of a rat race without preserving a regular life of prayer.

For the ordained minister, this includes, pre-eminently, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the public prayer of the Church. As the promise that you will make says, you pray the Liturgy of the Hours "with and for the People of God." For the ordained minister, his prayer is not just for his own sanctification, but for the entire Church. Seeking that time of prayer and intimacy with the Lord is how we reach Him. That is why it is also true that the only way out is in. In this

way, keep always before your eyes, my dear brothers, our one goal: eternal life in God's kingdom.

Conclusion

All must be subordinated to and directed by this one goal. This is the reason God's "revolution" is so different from those of this world and why He sometimes turns our lives upside-down. He wants to get us back on the path toward the only goal that really matters. For in the broadest possible spectrum of things, we can say, "*Eternal life* matters."