

Priesthood Ordination 2017

Remarks of Most Reverend John O. Barres, STD, JCL, DD
Bishop of Rockville Centre (Long Island, New York)

June 24, 2017

Father Michael Bissex, Father Liam McDonald, Father Michael Plona, Father Christopher Sullivan and Father John Wachowicz, I want to congratulate you, your parents, your families, your friends, your pastors, your brother priests, your Vocation Director Father Joseph Fitzgerald and his predecessors.

I want to congratulate Bishop William Murphy who, with his joy of the Gospel, love for the priesthood and wisdom, has guided and mentored you throughout your formation. Please join me in thanking Bishop Murphy and welcoming him home.

We are grateful for the presence of your formators: Vice Rector Father Thomas Berg and Dean of Students Father Nick Zientarski of Saint Joseph's Seminary, Father Robert Blyman from the Pontifical North American College, Father Gerald McBrearity, rector of Theological College, The National Seminary of The Catholic University of America, Father Ralph O'Donnell of the USCCB Committee of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations, and every inspirational Catholic priest, deacon and lay person who has influenced you on the path to the priesthood.

I also want to recognize Rose Sullivan, the mother of Father Christopher Sullivan. Rose is the Executive Director of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD) and a consultant to the USCCB Committee of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Rose's national work on behalf of vocations to the priesthood is a reminder to all of us today of the critical role of families and the laity in fostering and supporting vocations to the priesthood.

Fathers, as you begin your priestly ministry today, we recall that during the course of your seminary formation, you experienced a Jubilee Year of Mercy and two Synods on the Family, the World Meeting of Families and Pope Francis' visit to the United States with a Mass celebrated at Madison Square Garden that most of you were present at, and Pope Francis' 2016 post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of Loving*.

The gift of your priesthood has providentially emerged from the love and sacrifices you have experienced in your families. In the words of Pope Francis, your parents, your families have transformed the world and history by joyfully forming you and offering the gift of your priesthood to the Church and to the World today-- this day of your ordination to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Your experience of your own family life, the domestic Church you grew up in, will have a profound impact on the countless number of families you will serve and lay down your lives for in the parishes of Long Island.

Every dimension of a Catholic priest's ontological identity and pastoral charity lifts, energizes and inspires marriages, families and the entire human family. The priest's contemplative and sacrificial commitment to celibacy inspires the families he serves in his parish and beyond, and is a prophetic and charitable "sign of contradiction" to the entire human family. As Pope Francis says in *Amaris Laetitia*: "The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church." [1]

In a post Obergefell vs. Hodges SCOTUS decision world, the priest continues to be the humble and courageous champion of unity, fidelity, indissolubility, the complementarity of male and female, husband and wife in marriage, the unitive- procreative dimensions of marital love and the sanctity of human life at every stage of life.

The Catholic priest stands prophetically, in the spirit of St. John the Baptist, for the compassionate and merciful Splendor of Truth about Marriage and the Family, the truth that builds a civilization of love and ignites the *dramatic missionary growth* of the New Evangelization.

He stands for global religious liberty for families in solidarity with persecuted Christian and non-Christian families in the Middle East as well as the many families who formed their fundamental 1st Amendment religious liberty rights in jeopardy in this country.

The priest stands in solidarity, mercy and compassion with the hurting family, the broken family, the grieving family, the family in crisis and the immigrant, refugee family.

One of the finest hours in history of the priesthood in the Diocese of Rockville Centre is our steadfast advocacy of comprehensive immigration reform and our Good Samaritan pastoral charity to refugee immigrant families who have experienced so much anxiety and uncertainty and the tragedies of gang violence on Long Island. Our dedicated priests have had a courageous and compassionate presence throughout and on this day of priesthood ordinations, we thank them.

One of the most inspirational, but perhaps overlooked sections of *Amaris Laetitia* is paragraph 21 in which Pope Francis synthesizes a kaleidoscope of Gospel passages in which Jesus is present to families experiencing a wide- variety of family challenges, crises and tragedies.

From his miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana turning water into wine to his parable about family alienation and parental heartbreak in the Prodigal Son, to his weeping with Martha and Mary at the death of his friend Lazarus, we see that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega of every marriage and family. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega of the family of the Church and the entire human family.

Every priest living his consecration and mission as a priest, in his role as *Alter Christus* is called to this presence, called to this ministry of mercy and compassion, communion and mission with every family that the Holy Spirit providentially puts in his path.

Every dimension of the Catholic priest's life and pastoral artistry is an expression of the union of Divine Mercy and the Splendor of Catholic Truth flowing through the domestic churches of families, flowing through the family of the Catholic Church, flowing through the entire human family and the world. As Pope Francis says, "All family life is a 'shepherding' in

mercy." [322]

Father Bissex, Father McDonald, Father Plona, Father Sullivan and Father Wachowicz, with the change in your ontological identity today in your Ordination as priests, you have entered the inspiring presbyterate of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, a presbyterate deeply committed to holiness, the New Evangelization, the Splendor of Truth, the Divine Mercy and *dramatic missionary growth*.

Always look to your wise and experienced older brothers in the priesthood for fraternity, guidance, correction and support. And always go to the priest saints who were instruments of the Divine Mercy to the families they served in history.

St. John Vianney, pray for us!
St. John Neumann, pray for us!
St. John XXIII, pray for us!
Blessed Paul VI, pray for us!
St. John Paul II, pray for us!
St. Junipero Serra, pray for us!