

Pre-Ordination Vespers Homily – July 27, 2011

Good evening! What a joy to be here in this beautiful Cathedral, gathered in prayer, as we celebrate this great event for the Diocese of Rapid City. It is great joy for all of you to join me here this evening.

In particular, Bishop Cupich, I want to welcome you back to the Diocese and to this Cathedral. Thank you for leading us in prayer this evening.

When I received a call from the Nuncio, inquiring as to whether I would accept the Holy Father's appointment as the next bishop of the Diocese of Rapid City, my heart was filled with panic.

As the time has gone by over these past 2 ½ months for me, the Lord has transformed that panic and fear into a deep joy and happiness in being chosen as the 8th bishop of this Diocese. When I first came to Rapid City for the public announcement of the Holy Father's appointment, I didn't know what to expect. But what I found was a diocese filled with warm, hospitable, kind, faith filled people. My encounter with so many of you during those 3 days back in May, your warmth and welcome, did wonders in settling my heart about what Pope Benedict was asking of me in leaving everything behind in Davenport and coming to western South Dakota. It is really great to be here as your new shepherd.

I am deeply grateful to the welcome that I have received, from so many of you, and now this evening, from some of the leaders of this community. Thank you so much.

And thank you so much for the gifts presented to me. Your kindness is deeply appreciated.

Fr. Biegler in his article in the current issue of the West River Catholic speaks so well of the many gifts that this great diocese is giving me as I begin my ministry as their shepherd. I want to highlight a few of them.

- a marvelous and dedicated Chancery staff (I have already experienced this.)
- faithful and dedicated priests with a great spirit of fraternity (I look forward to being a part of this spirit of fraternity.)
- Humble and dedicated men & women religious who pour out their lives for the greater glory of God

- The vibrant faith and wisdom of our permanent deacons (and their wives)
- The resilient faith and warm hospitality of the people of western South Dakota
- The humble and deep spirituality of the Lakota people (as I unwrap this gift, I very much look forward to learning more about you, your culture and traditions.)
- The beautiful love of Mary among the Hispanic people

I want all of you to know that I graciously accept these gifts with humility and love, with open hands to treasure and not to possess. And “yes”, I know that I will be blessed by the people of this diocese.

Fr. Biegler also stated in his article: “Yes, we will be blessed by our new shepherd.”

When I read this, my thoughts went to the question, “What are the people of this Diocese receiving?”

- A man who loves the Lord and who is compelled to share it with others
- A man who loves and cherishes the priesthood
- A man who loves people and is open to learning from them
- A priest dedicated to the service of this beautiful Catholic Church and her traditions
- A man who enjoys the company of others, but also values his time alone with himself and with God
- A man who loves the beauty of his surroundings.
- A man who is excited about learning how to be your bishop
- And hopefully, you are getting a shepherd who will greatly magnify the love of God in your midst; a love that has gripped me and changed me and set me on this path.

I humbly ask you to receive this gift – your new shepherd. The Lord will work miracles through us.

In the reading tonight from St. James, we heard, *“Every worthwhile gift, every genuine benefit comes from above, descending from the Father of the heavenly luminaries. He wills to bring us to birth with a word spoken in truth so that we may be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Humbly*

welcome the word that has taken root in you, with its power to save you. Act on this word. In doing so, blessed with this man be in whatever he does.”

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Over the past number of weeks, I have encountered the Lord in the scriptures in so many ways- and perhaps in ways I have not experienced before, given my current change in priestly ministry – through the experience of Moses at the Burning Bush, the Lord choosing and calling him to lead his people out of Egypt; the prayer of young Solomon we just heard on Sunday, who was facing the challenges of what it means to be a king; perhaps wondering if he has what it takes, knowing that it takes more than just natural abilities, praying for “*an understanding heart to judge and serve the Lord’s people....to be able to distinguish right from wrong.*” – his great prayer for wisdom. I experienced in a new way, the invitation of Jesus to take his yoke upon me and learn from him. This is just to name a couple.

The Word of God is powerful indeed. It has the power to save us and bring us to a life in abundance.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict, in *Verbum Domini* (The Word of the Lord), writes: “*There is no greater priority than this: to enable the people of our time once more to encounter God, the God who speaks to us and shares his love so that we might have life in abundance.*” He proposes a new way for us to conceive of God’s Word. “*The Word of God is not simply audible. Not only does it have a voice, now the Word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth.*”

Jesus Christ meets us in our meditation upon the Sacred Scriptures. “*God’s Word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church.*”

This word must be shared “*as an openness to our problems, a response to our questions, a broadening of our values and the fulfillment of our aspirations.*”

The Holy Father in quoting St. Bonaventure: “*The fruit of sacred Scripture is not any fruit whatsoever, but the very fullness of eternal happiness. Sacred Scripture is the book containing the words of eternal life, so that we may not only believe*

in, but also possess eternal life, in which we will see and love, and all our desires will be fulfilled.”

This Word of God was the instrument and catalyst which set me on the road to priesthood. It has been what has sustained me over the past 17 years as a priest, and it is what continues to draw me into the heart of Jesus, where the depth of his love for me is revealed.

Act on this word. In doing so, blessed with this man be in whatever he does.”

In conclusion, with the words of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict: *“In the Word of God, Jesus says today to each person: ‘I am yours, I give myself to you’ so that we can receive and respond, saying in return: ‘I am yours.’”*

My friends as we gather this evening, may we all say again, deep in our hearts, *“I AM yours.”*