

Ordination Comments – July 28, 2011

Thanks to:

Archbishop Nienstedt

Bishop Amos

Bishop Aquila

Bishop Franklin

My brother bishops.....I can truly call you that now. How amazing this is!!

Fr. Steve Biegler, Administrator who has taken care of the Diocese so well – a true servant of the Lord in taking on so much. Thank you. You are probably very relieved at this moment!

Msgr. Marco Prizzi, Nuncio Representative for representing the now late Archbishop Sambini. Be assured of prayers for the repose of his soul and for his family who grieve their loss.

Ordination Steering Committee – Pam Fritz; Stephanie Hurd; Margaret Simonson; Teresa Spiess - the phenomenal task of organizing this whole celebration and carrying it out with great style and grace. All the great many details.....We have all enjoyed so much because of your efforts and your sacrifices– you are true servants. I can't thank you enough.

Volunteers – the many people who have and are working behind the scenes to ensure the needs of you are taken care of.....too many to name individually. But thank you.

Fr. Michel Mulloy – for the extraordinary work you have done preparing for the Vespers service last night at the Cathedral and this wonderful ordination here today. All the work involved in getting this Civic Center turned into a beautiful place of worship. My deepest gratitude to you. You have been a delight to work with in these preparations.....even in the midst of preparing for newly ordained Fr. Sparks' ordination 2 weeks ago. You have had a lot to do these past couple of months....in addition to your work as Rector of the Cathedral. Thank you.

I give thanks to my parents, both who are viewing this celebration from a little different perspective. They have taught me much. I thank them for providing me with a Catholic education that instilled this faith and love of God in me.

Family Members...for being present here and supporting me over the years. What a joy to have you present.

My brother Priests and Friends from the Davenport Diocese who have helped me become the priest that I am today.

Priests, religious and People of Rapid City Diocese – whom I greatly look forward to being with and getting to know you over the years. I am thrilled to be your new bishop.

I want to acknowledge and give thanks to the many people who have been instrumental in my formation as a person and a priest. My faith is what it is today because of many people who have shown me the love of God, who have inspired me by their own faith, and who have shown me the path to priesthood.

But most importantly, I give thanks to Almighty God, to Jesus, the Glory of the Father's in his own self surrender, and to the Holy Spirit who have given me the strength and courage to say "yes" to all the Lord has asked of me.

When I look at my life over the past 30 years, it has been an utterly amazing journey – an unbelievable path for me. How in the world did I get here? I moved to the Davenport Diocese 30 years ago to fly a traffic watch in a single engine Cessna over the Quad City area for a local radio station. And now 30 years later, end up becoming the 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Rapid City. How did this happen? Who could have written this script besides the Lord?

My life is a story of the amazing love of God.

Just a little bit about this.

Twenty nine years ago, when life was not going so well, when it was a challenge to find happiness in the struggles of everyday life trying to make ends meet, I recall thinking about the meaning of life, my life in particular. Was this all there is to life? That question began my search for God ...and the beauty of it all, God let himself be found.

All through life growing up, I had always been told that God loves us...that God loves me. It was part of the teaching that I had received in Catholic schools through the 8th grade and in RE classes. The question in my own mind and heart was, "If this is the case, then what does this experience of God's love look like, feel like?" I knew what it was like to be loved on a human level. I had felt love before, had loved others, and knew what love was like. But what does God's love look like and feel like? That was my question and this became prayer – *"Lord, if you truly love me, give me a lived experience of this love. I want to know what it feels like. I don't want my relationship with you to be an intellectual or academic exercise. I want to experience your love for me in a very personal and intimate way."*

This daily prayer, 29 years ago, set me on this journey that has led me to this monumental moment in my life. I cannot begin to tell you what this has been like. We don't have time today, but simply Unbelievable! **But I can tell you** that this is the greatest desire of God.....to give each of us a deep experience of his love for us personally.....through Christ Jesus.

The Father answered my prayer and this has decided everything for me. A person in love with Lord will do anything for Him. This great **gift of love** has led me to the priesthood; it has led me to marvelous experiences of priestly ministry over the last the past 17 years – in parish ministry, in vocation work, in Chancery work, in seminarian formation, and now it has led me to this moment as I stand before all of you as your new bishop.

My prayer led me to a personal encounter with "the glory of the Father" in Jesus Christ. His love for me and mine for him is what has guided me...and continues to guide me as I embark upon this new ministry with all of you in western South Dakota.

One of my favorite quotes is from Fr. Pedro Arrupe, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus. He points out, **"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love with God in a quite absolute way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know (who you hang around with), what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love. Stay in love. And it will decide everything."**

For me, it has decided everything.

I chose “No Greater Love” for my Episcopal motto because of my experience of the Lord which has led me to today. Coming to an increased understanding of the depth of Christ’s love for us has come over time, has increased over the years as I have desired to seek his will for my life. This has come through extraordinary experiences, but so often has come through the ordinary experiences and challenges of life and ministry. I have been richly blessed!

There really is “no greater love than to lay down one’s life for his beloved.” It is what Jesus has done for you and me. It is what I have been asked to do in leaving everything behind to come to western South Dakota to be your bishop. And it is what I seek to do as I begin my new ministry with all of you because it is what really gives glory to the Father.

In the end, falling in love with the Lord Jesus is not so much about me or any of us. “We can love God because he has first loved us.” God’s love and glory is manifested here today in this very special celebration.

I need to bring this to a close. My life of faith and love for the Lord will be shared with all of you as time goes on. My gratitude today is deep and rich as I stand before you.

The words of Mary’s Magnificat come to mind: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is His name.”

As I begin my ministry with you today, I would like to conclude my comments today with a prayer *translated by Lakota Sioux Chief Yellow Lark in 1887.*

*O Great Spirit,
Whose voice I hear in the winds,
And whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me!
I am small and weak;
I need your strength and wisdom.*

Let me walk in Beauty, and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught "your" people.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy.....myself.

Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.

So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame.

My dear friends, thank you for being here today as God's love is showered upon us. I look forward to the many years ahead with all of you. Through our time together, may we all come to know the ever deepening love of God manifested in Christ Jesus. God bless you all!