

PRESBYTERAL ORDINATION

OUR LADY OF LOURDES
ABA

AUGUST 14, 2010.

PRIEST, THE IRREPLACEABLE

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,
Very Dear Ordinands,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

GREETINGS

As Bishop of this Diocese I am particularly glad to welcome 5 new Priests into the presbyterium of **Aba**. Together with the Vicar General, the Chancellor and all the Priests, I thank the Lord for the gift of these new pastors of the People of God in **Aba**. My deferent thought goes in a very special way to Monsignor Fortunatus **Nwachukwu**, the Vatican Director of Protocol, who in his service of charity is here with us.

I would like to address a special greeting to you, beloved ordinands: today you are the centre of attention of the People of God, symbolically represented by the people who fill this beautiful Church of Our Lady of Lourdes. They fill it with their prayers and their singing, with their sincere and deep affection, their authentic emotion, their human and spiritual joy. Among this People of God a special place is reserved for your parents and relatives, your friends and companions, the Superiors and teachers in your Seminaries, the various parish communities and the different sectors of the Church from which you come and which have accompanied you on your journey, as well as those to whom you have already offered your pastoral service. With distinct esteem we thank the Parish Priest Reverend Jacob Ezinwa **Ugboaja**, Reverend Dr. Edmund **Ogbonna** (in residence), the Parochial Vicar Reverend Chidi **Obilor**, Parish Council and the entire Community of this great Parish for all the superlative and detailed arrangement for this auspicious day.

Thus today it is the whole Church of **Aba** which is giving thanks and praying for you, which puts such great trust and hope in your future, which expects abundant fruits of holiness and good from your priestly ministry.

THE READING

The readings we have just heard, harp on the importance of making choices. We live and die by the choices we, make. Obviously our actions may have consequences far beyond ourselves, but the guilt and blame is ours alone. For Philip of Macedonia once said:

*You all see that we ourselves are responsible
for the good and the ill that is said of us.*

Today too we celebrate the life of St. Maximilian **Kolbe**, born in **Poland** in 1894 and joined the Franciscans. During his priestly life, he worked for the spread of the Gospel in his native **Poland** as well as in **Japan**, and had a great devotion to Our Lady. During the Nazi occupation of Poland, he helped thousands of refugees, including Polish Jews. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1941 and imprisoned at Auschwitz. Three months after Maximilian's arrival, a prisoner escaped and, in retaliation, 10 men were chosen at random to die. One of them was a young father and Maximilian offered to take his place. His offer was accepted. Maximilian's sacrifice seemed to express a deep understanding of the importance of a father to his family. Oh! A priest is irreplaceable!

SAYING YES

Given the rapacious human appetite for nearly everything, it is difficult to accept the reality of limits. Time will teach us all, however, that we simply cannot have everything we want. We cannot have all of the good things we want. One of life's most painful truths is that we cannot say *Yes* to something without saying *No* to something else. A child in a candy store beholds an incredible scene. Not only is there candy everywhere, but there are hundreds of different kinds of candy. How will the child choose, when saying *Yes* to one kind of candy means saying *No* to all the rest?

In our most important choices, saying *Yes* always involves saying *No*. If two people choose each other as marriage partners, if they commit their lives and futures to each other, in saying *Yes* to each other, they are saying *No* to millions of other individuals. The *Yes* is meaningless if it is not exclusive, if it does not exclude all others. *I take you means I do not take any others*. Marriage is God's ideal, wherein two people say *Yes* to each other and *No* to all others. At the opposite end is the attempt to say *Yes* to everything and everyone, and it leads to self-destruction.

Jesus daily spoke to people who were anxious, some about not having enough, others about not having everything. He told them they must choose one thing, out of all other possibilities, to which they would say *Yes*. *Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be yours as well*. Committing ourselves is the way to finding ourselves. When we say **Yes** to the kingdom of God alone, everything else finds its proper place. The priesthood is based on having the courage to say yes to another will, that precisely by conforming to God's will, we will penetrate ever more deeply into the truth of our own being and our ministry.

SEX TO UNSEAT THE PRIESTHOOD?

Sam **Miller**, prominent 'Cleveland businessman - Jewish, not Catholic - fighting mad about and concentrated effort by the media to denigrate the Catholic Church, masterly and appositely said that:

During my entire life I've never seen a greater vindictive, more scurrilous, biased campaign against the Catholic Church as I have seen in the last 18 months.

There is a concentrated effort by the media today to totally denigrate in every way the Catholic Church in the world. They have now blamed the disease of pedophilia on the Catholic Church. You and I have been living in a false paradise. Wake up and recognize that many people don't like Catholics. What are these people trying to accomplish? A pound of flesh on the Catholic priesthood.

In the midst of media hype, and the unrelenting insinuations against the Holy Father Himself - the one who has been more vigorous in cleansing the Church of the effects of this sickening sin of abuse of minors, - Benedict XVI said with characteristic exemplary humility:

In spite of all our weaknesses, priests are precious presences in your life. They are the clear and credible witnesses of reconciliation with God at the very time when an effort is being made to cloud the reality and beauty of their mission. They are in fact irreplaceable and fundamental during the Church's earthly pilgrimage.¹

THE ARMOUR OF RECONCILIATION

Calamitas virtutis occasio est ²

Crisis. Crisis in Chinese is one word. It means, on the one side, a real crisis problems etc but on the other side means great opportunity. The times we now live in highlight purification and call us with an audible voice to return to our Yes and the need to approach the sacrament of reconciliation with God. The lack of participation in this sacrament is at the root of many evils in the life of the Church and in the life of the priest. My dear ordinands, the spiritual maturity of a candidate to receive priestly ordination becomes evident in the fact that he receives - at least once a month - the sacrament of reconciliation.

DON'T BE SATISFIED WITH MEDIOCRITY

There is a wonderful line in one of the songs in the long-running musical called *The Fantasticks*. The young teenage girl is filled with a vivid sense of her own self-importance. She imagines herself a woman of great beauty and desirability. She longs for romantic adventure and memorable experiences. At one point in her song of self-appraisal and self-congratulations, she bursts out: Please God, don't let me be ordinary! That's a sentiment that every young person feels with a longing that borders

¹ Benedict XVI in Sulmona, in Italy's Abruzzo region

² Seneca, De Providentia, IV.6: Disaster is virtue's opportunity.

on physical pain. They don't want to be ordinary. They want to be special. They want to be special to themselves and to others. It's only later in life that this painful longing to be special begins to fade. It's only later in life that people begin to settle for mediocrity.

These days affirm that there is no room for mediocrity. Christ is at the base of the priesthood. The priest must necessarily be like Christ. He must necessarily be holy. Priestly holiness is not an external imperative, it is the imperative of what we are. In fact, without priestly holiness, all is chaos. In Plutarch's **Moralia** the saying goes: *No man has any right to rule who is not better than the people over whom he rules.*

EXHORTATION

Brother priests, love your priesthood. Be profoundly Eucharistic. Be faithful to the end. You are called not to be successful but to be faithful, (Mother **Teresa**). Be able to see in it that evangelical treasure for which it is worth giving one's all. And to you, Christian Community, I ask for help, understanding, collaboration and prayer for priests.

CONCLUSION

May Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, the Handmaid of the Lord, who conformed her will to that of God, who brought forth Christ, giving him to the world, who followed the Son even to the foot of the Cross in the supreme act of love, accompany you every day of your life and of your ministry. Thanks to the affection of this tender and strong Mother, you will be able to be joyously faithful to the orders that as priests are being conferred on you today: to conform yourselves to Christ the Priest, who was able to obey the Father's will and to love man to the very end.