



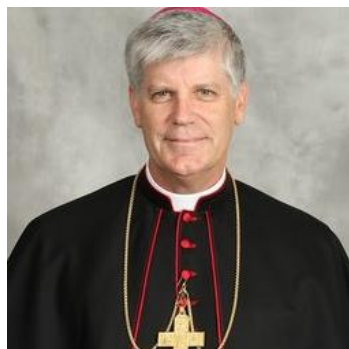
REGNUM CHRISTI
LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST

Homily from Bishop Ned Schlesinger and Closing Remarks from Fr. John Connor, LC

Ordination Mass of Fr. Vinh Pham, LC, and Fr. Michael Sester, LC
Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Parish, Atlanta, Georgia
May 29th, 2021

Homily

Bishop Ned Schlesinger
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Atlanta



Today's first reading is very familiar, especially at an ordination or a confirmation. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me." What does that mean, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us? For Vinh and Michael, rather than think about something happening to you today, think of your ordination as someone who is working in you, living and acting and transforming you. You are not ordained just to perform rituals, or do priestly tasks. You must strive, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to become a living image, or icon of Christ, the High Priest and Good Shepherd, and an image of God the Father. Jesus says, "if you've seen me, you've seen the Father." And if we are acting *in persona Christi*, you should become fathers in the fullest sense that we understand it as God is Father of all. The people of God should not look at you as managers of a business. You are *Alter Christus* who are willing to become like Jesus, a victim, a sacrifice. A good shepherd, not a hired hand, who knows his sheep and calls them by name and lays down one's life for them. The people of God will call you "father." Let this salutation be more than a title, let it be a lived reality.

What then, will be your first duty as a priest? This year marks my 25th anniversary of priesthood. Along with Peter Vu, and perhaps some other priests who are

celebrating their 25th anniversary. On my ordination day, before I even got unvested, somebody asked me to hear their confession. So my first duty as a priest, you would think is to give the sacrament to the people that asked, and I've never denied a confession to another person. I've had to delay it at times, but I've never denied that sacrament. But your first duty as a priest is to pray and maintain communion with Christ, for he is the vine and you are his branches, for you are his priests. You must remain in him and remain in his love. The effectiveness of your priesthood stems from this relationship. For as Jesus says, apart from him, the vine, you can do nothing.

So important it is for priests to be men of prayer. St. Paul even advised Timothy to fan into flame, to stir into flame, the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. So watch over your prayer life. Guard it with barbed wire. Do not let this thief steal the treasure that is within you. Allow yourselves to be first ministered to, before you minister to others. The spirit of Lord is upon you, because the Lord has anointed you. What does it mean to be anointed? Are you anointed with the oil of gladness? Are you filled with joy at being anointed by the Spirit?

Beware of discouragement. And I say this not only to the priests today, but to all of you here today. We live in a very secular society. We live in a world where Christians seem to be out of step with the trends that are in the news today. We can become very discouraged that we're losing the spiritual battle, and focus on numbers rather than the action of God in his church. You did not choose Christ, Christ chose you. Not because you're the perfect person for the job. Do not concern yourself with being successful as priests. The devil will get you to believe in your importance. And when you fail, he will lead you into discouragement. Do not be too hard on yourself. And do not let yourself become overwhelmed by your own estimation of strength or weakness. Remember that St. Peter who said he would never deny Jesus, denied that he knew him three times. Be gentle, first with yourselves. It's easy to be hard on ourselves. We need to be like Saint Therese of Lisieux, and embrace our littleness and our weakness, and even love it to the point of loving the mercy of God, whose power reaches perfection in our weakness.

St. John Chrysostom states, and this is for all of us, "Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again, for forgiveness has risen from the grave." Mercy.

Forgiveness. Those who have been forgiven little, love little. Those who are forgiven much, love much. It's all about the greatness of God and His mercy. Do not focus on the results or the outcomes. Beware of the voice of the evil one who once again works overtime in our failures. Remember the power of obedience as listening. The lake of Gennesareth had denied its fishes to Peter's nets. A whole night in vain. Then obedient, he lowered his net again into the water, and they caught a huge number of fish. St. José Maria Escriva says, "Believe me, the miracle is repeated each day."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted." Good news, not bad news, not harsh news. Sometimes you must correct the sheep. Sometimes you must discipline them. But you are an *Amoris Officium*, which is a service of love for them. The priest today must not exercise his ministry in an overbearing manner. He is not called to lord it over other people. Remember what Jesus said when the apostles argued about who was the greatest? He pointed out the rulers of the Gentiles. You know how they make their authority felt and love to rule it over others. But it cannot be that way with you. The greatest among you must be the servant. The least. People will come to you for the sacraments, but they should leave you with an image of the Good Shepherd.

In our second reading today, we hear that every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, and you will offer the sacrifice of the Mass, the most powerful thing on earth. But, as we hear in the reading, Jesus is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for the high priest himself is beset by weakness. Pay attention to the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are yours to savor and share with others. Love, joy, peace, patience or long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Priests' hearts should not be so concerned about being right or getting it right, as in lifting the burdens of others. Care for the sheep. In your preaching, remember that the church is a hospital, as St. John Chrysostom says, the church is a hospital, and not a courtroom for souls. She does not condemn on behalf of sins but grants remission of sins.

The priests today should not be concerned about human respect, about being overlooked for an assignment, or even about being criticized by the news, the media, the laity, and so forth. Pastoral charity should not be limited, not even to

those who are not on your side. Jesus himself was spurned and avoided by men. A man of suffering, knowing pain, like one from whom you turn your face. Spurned. And we held him in no esteem. *Misericordia* is a Latin word, and Spanish as well. It comes from three words: *miseria*, *cor*, as in *corazon*, and *dar*, *dare*. It means to give one's heart to the miserable. That's what it means to have mercy. Your priesthood is to be exercised in mercy to those who are irregular, out of place, out of step, on the fringes, disenfranchised, hostile to the church. "Why does your master eat with sinners?" Those who are healthy do not need the priests, but those who are sick.

Pope Francis has inaugurated a pastoral style, or at least he's affirming a pastoral style, of not hiding behind Chancery walls, or doctrine, or so forth. But going out into the marketplace, where we encounter others, accompany them, and introduce them to Jesus Christ, who saves and lift them up. Your pulpit must not only be in a church, but in the marketplace. Your message must be preceded by love rather than judgment. How will you preach? What will your people hear? Will they know that Jesus loves them and is merciful?

And finally, remember when you gather others into the people of God through baptism, and when you forgive sins in the name of Christ and the Church in the Sacrament of Penance, when you comfort the sick with holy oil, and celebrate the sacred rites, when you offer prayers of praise and thanks to God throughout the hours of the day, it is not only for the people of God, but for the whole world. Remember then that you are taken from among men and appointed on their behalf for those things that pertain to God. Therefore, carry out the ministry of Christ the Priest with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your own concerns but to those of Jesus Christ. Finally, my dear brothers, exercising for your part the office of Christ, Head and Shepherd, while united with the bishop and your provincial superior, strive to bring the faithful together into one family, so you may lead them to God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Keep always before your eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, who came to seek out and save what was lost. May Mary, Mother of priests protect you from this day forward. Amen.

Closing Remarks

Fr. John Connor, LC

General Director of the Legionaries of Christ



Bishop Ned, thank you for being here with us. On behalf of all the Legionaries in a particular way, Fr. Michael and Fr. Vinh, their family members, their parents, friends that have come from afar, and Regnum Christi members, we're deeply grateful for you presiding at this holy Mass and this ordination. Bishop Ned, you've been a good friend. More importantly, you've been a good father and shepherd to us, your brothers.

As you know Bishop Ned, your Legionaries are very passionate about Jesus Christ. And we're passionate about serving the Church. We share that passion with our brothers and sisters in Regnum Christi. And as you mentioned in your homily, the spirit of service, humble service, is the path of Jesus Christ and the example that the Church and the culture needs. Our prayer is that we may be that example, with the grace of God. We dream of seeing Christ reign in the hearts of men, women, families, society, culture. And hopefully more men give their lives to Jesus Christ, like these two behind me.

We place ourselves at your service, at the service of Archbishop Hartmeyer, and our Holy Father Pope Francis with that same passion, and hopefully humility. I believe it was the late Cardinal George at an ordination who once said, reflecting on the Last Supper and the priesthood, and Christ's example at the washing of the feet, "If we truly want to follow Christ more closely, and serve as he did, we must stop fighting over the first place at the table and start fighting over the towel." I love that — fighting over the towel, to serve the Lord, serve the church, and serve so many souls. We want to serve with this same spirit. I join with all here present to pray for these newly ordained, that they, and we together, never lose this passion for Jesus Christ, for souls, and for the church, this eagerness to serve with this spirit of humility and to see Christ reign in all families, people, and society. Thank you.