

**Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron  
Presbyterate Ordination Homily  
Blessed Sacrament Cathedral  
May 30, 2009**

**(As transcribed from digital audio recording at liturgy)**

I have written here one of the happiest parts of the Bishop's Office is to ordain men to the priesthood. I come into the ambo tonight thinking, or this morning, maybe there isn't even any other happy thing and I should have gotten rid of that qualification. This is for me today a great, great joy. It's particularly a joy to me because this is my first opportunity to ordain men for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Detroit. And I am sure I share that joy along with Cardinal Maida and Cardinal Szoka, and we're very glad, Cardinal Szoka, that you're back with us. So we know the Holy Father misses you but we're glad you're here with us. Thank you. (applause)

In addition, this is a great joy for me because some of you were even students at the Seminary when I was rector. A joy, because I love the priesthood and I am so glad to be able to share it with you, so that the priestly ministry may be spread in the life of the Church, which means that the Eucharistic presence of Jesus will be spread in the life of the church.

Part of this blessed office that comes to me this day is to break open God's Word, to help us hear what God has to say this sacrament, this ministry that he will work in our midst. Before I take up that ministry, I want to offer some congratulations: First of all to you ordinands, that come to the Cathedral today very much aware of the diverse paths by which God has led you to this morning. Some of that I know; other dimensions of that path are known only to you and the Holy Spirit. And so all of us here join in thanking God and blessing God's name for bringing you to this day. I offer words of congratulations to your parents and to

your families, your families by nature of course – brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, everybody who is so happy today for your ordination. And congratulations to the church communities, the parishes and other groups that have assisted you in coming to this day. And in particular, I am very much aware of the priests who have accompanied you on the path to today's ordination. Your friends – congratulations to them. And especially, and I wouldn't be a good former rector if I didn't do this – congratulations to you, Monsignor Monforton, and to everybody who works with you at the Seminary. And I am very grateful for this service of the Church.

I actually was part of the discussion that led to Cardinal Maida setting, some years ago, that the vigil of Pentecost would be the ordinary day for priestly ordinations here in the Archdiocese. There is a significant sense to that: it's a way for the whole Archdiocese to observe the great feast of Pentecost, especially to underscore the fact that priests are gifts of grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit made to our local Church. Our singing of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* as we began the ordination very much underscores the sense of this decision that we should have ordination today in Blessed Sacrament Cathedral on the vigil of Pentecost.

And so in my preaching, I'd like to reflect for a while on the act of ordination, the ordaining sacrament as the action of the Holy Spirit. More specifically, I want to reflect with you on priestly consecration as the act of the Holy Spirit whom we name identify as both Creator and Consoler. That is, I want to help us think more deeply about ordination as both an act of creating and an act of consoling. In the very first line of the hymn we sang, we named the Holy Spirit as Creator and this is certainly a title to which the Scripture itself bears witness. This is the mission of the Holy Spirit in the world as he comes from the side of the Father and the Son to create.

We know that from the Book of Genesis, how in the beginning the Spirit hovered over the water, over the chaos, so that when the Father spoke the Word the world would be made. And then, even more wondrously, the Holy Spirit is the aged, the actor of the new creation, when God, on the eighth day after he had rested, decided, determined, willed to begin the new creation – it was by breathing the Holy Spirit back into the body of the new Adam, that the world was made new again, and even more marvelously, restored. And we witness this truth of the Holy Spirit as the Creator when we say the little versicle in response that so many of us know by heart: *“Send forth your spirit O Lord and all things will be created and you will renew the face of the earth.”*

Raymond, Philip, David, Charles, Michael, Noel Jean, you were made a new creation on the day you were baptized. And now, through priestly ordination, you will receive a new character, your creation in Jesus will be further specified, and this truth is clearly expressed both in the matter and form of priestly ordination. The matter is the imposition of hands, an epiclesis, a gesture to call down the Holy Spirit upon you. The calling down of the Holy Spirit is expressed in the form, in the prayer: *“Grant we pray Almighty Father to these your servants the dignity of the priesthood. Renew deep within them the spirit of holiness. May they henceforth possess this office which comes from you, O God, and is next in rank to the office of bishop. And by the example of their manner of life, may they instill right conduct.”* By your priestly ordination you are recreated as priests.

St. Paul, in the first reading we heard today, himself witnesses to this truth when he tells the presbyteri, the priests from Ephesus, they have been made these servants of the Church as St. Paul says through the appointing of the Holy Spirit. This truth is articulated in the instruction found in the *Pontifical for the Ordination Rite* when it says to the ordinands, *“In being configured to Christ the Eternal High Priest and joined to the priesthood of bishops, you will be consecrated as true*

*priests of the New Testament to preach the Gospel, to shepherd God's people, and to celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Lord's sacrifice."*

That neatly summarizes the new creation you will be after the imposition of hands and my prayer. You will be recreated into signs, into sacraments of Christ, Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church. You will be endowed by this new creation with the three-fold office of teaching, sanctifying, leading. And yet, we say in the life of the Church, in the hymn, not only that the Holy Spirit who works in you today is Creator, he is also consoler. We mention in our hymn we sang, "*Quidiceris paraclitus,*" the passive voice that this name of the Holy Spirit is consoler, is paraclete, is not our invention. This is the name that Jesus himself gives to the Spirit; it's his own coinage. For understanding the Holy Spirit's action in ordaining is an act of consoling, a movement to understand that I believe is very important for all of us in the Cathedral today, to understand how it is in ordaining that the Holy Spirit consoles.

I would like to take all of us a moment to the writings, the thought of the great 20th century German theologian, Romano Guardini, who moves us to consider: What does it mean to console? After posing the question of the meaning of comfort, Father Guardini directs us toward an answer by asking us to consider how comforting happens, how it comes about. And he starts to answer this question he poses by specifying how comforting does not happen, how comforting does not come about, and in setting up that contrast with the wrong answer he leads us to the right one.

How does comforting come about? Certainly not by reasoning and reckoning. Advice and argument are no comfort – they leave us cold; they leave man alone in his need and suffering. Nothing comes to him from them. But comfort is full of life; it has an immediacy and an intimacy that makes all things new. To comfort you must love. You must be open and enter into the other's

heart. You must be observant and have a free and sensitive heart that finds the paths of life with quiet assurance. You must be able to discover the sore and withered places. You must have the subtlety and strength to penetrate to the living center, to the deep source of that life that has dried up. The heart must combine with this source of life, must summon it to life again so that it can flow through all the deserts and ruins within. To do this, is truly to comfort.

And so this great German theologian, this great teacher, instructs us that to comfort is to touch the heart of another and, in that touching, to make the other's heart live. And so the Holy Spirit is the consoler, the consoling Spirit, because his mission is to touch our hearts and make them alive with the very life of God. The Holy Spirit makes God the inaccessibly holy one near, but for all of that nonetheless holy. As Guardini puts it, the Holy Spirit is nearness, he is the nearness of the holy, the nearness of the unapproachable, he says certainly recognizing the paradox.

The Holy Spirit is the inner being of the inaccessible. He is the holiness whose very breath is God. The Holy Spirit is he who, as St. Paul reminds us, searches out the depths of divinity itself. It is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the consoler, that God who is almighty and all powerful, awesome beyond all imagining, there is in his heart the deepest concerns of our hearts and bestows on us his watchful care. The Holy Spirit is the consoler because he is the bond between God's heart and our hearts. It is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the consoler, that the all-holy God says and never ceases to say – *“I will give you everything and be all for you so that you may become what I have implanted in you.”*

And so, Raymond, Philip, David, Charles, Michael, Noel Jean, the Holy Spirit, in ordaining you today, enters your hearts. He touches what is deepest and most intimate in you. He awakens your hearts to be hearts according to God's

heart, according to the Sacred Heart, according to the priestly heart of Jesus. And so here, in the Cathedral today, is fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, when Jeremiah said to the children of Israel that the Lord God would give us shepherds after his own heart. And so we all begin to see that these two ways for the Holy Spirit to act, creating and consoling as he comes down upon these six men, these two ways are not simply simultaneous actions, or actions simply in a sequence of first one and then the other. They are not even just one of them the cause and the other the effect. Consoling, creating, each is cause and each is the effect of the other. In acting to ordain you, the Holy Spirit creates you priests by consoling your hearts, and he consoles your hearts by making them to be priestly, by reshaping them into the hearts of Jesus Christ.

I ask your patience and please follow me here in a little bit of a thought experiment. Think about what it would be like to create without consoling. What would it be like to create you priests without binding your hearts to God's heart? It would be a kind of act of brute force, the sort of thing one accomplishes when the hammer strikes the anvil. That is an ordination where the Creator's Spirit to make you a priest, without consoling you, would be for you to be pounded into the priesthood. Without that identity being elicited, drawn out from your deepest selves. Or on the other hand, for the Holy Spirit to console you this morning without creating you, without actually changing the hearts, your hearts, which he binds to God would be to operate without any force at all; the sort of thing that occurs when one feigns acting but is really only assuming a pose or adopting a posture. That is, at ordination, for the Creator's Spirit to console you without creating you to be priests would be to provoke mere sentiments of priestly aspiration – the stirring up of nothing more than sighs with no real effect. What is the basis for my saying the Holy Spirit creates you to be priests while he consoles

you, and consoles you in creating you priests? It is the very nature of love, the nature of God's own ever-creative love.

Again, to Guardini, to console is to awaken, to generate, and to create. To do this is to call forth the best in the other person. Such comfort liberates in the very act of permeating. The work of love, the effect of love is to establish communion. In this sacrament of Holy Orders, you six are established in communion with Christ the High Priest. This act of love, this binding, irrevocably in communion is the touching and transforming of your hearts. Thus, Christ, at the Last Supper, the hour at which he first commissioned men to be priests, says as we heard in the Gospel, “*remain in my love.*” See, it’s love himself that makes a man a priest. Love is making you priests today and Jesus says to you in this hour – remain, abide, stay forever in this love which I will never take away from you. Act out that love according to the Lord’s command and example. That is to say, every day, do what the Holy Spirit is about to make you become.

And so my sisters and brothers, we’re all witnesses to what the Holy Spirit is doing here today mystically, sacramentally. Under the appearances of these signs we are about to see the love of God act. And so, let us answer his action with our loving, for loving in return is the only fit response to God's love. As we go forward with the rite, let every word, our every gesture, our every thought, our every sentiment from here on be an expression of our love. Let them all be made alive with our love. Join with me in prayer: Send forth your Spirit O Lord and they will be created. Raymond, Philip, David, Charles, Michael, Noel Jean – they will be created priests and you will renew the face of the earth. Amen.