

Homily for Ordination on April 15th, 2012 in Indianapolis

Dear Maria, Bernie, Corene, Irene and Martha, Brothers and Sisters

We just heard the words of our Brother Jesus, given to us in the Gospel of John: As Abba God sent me, so I am sending you.

These are appropriate words for an ordination. You five have spent much time praying, discerning and listening before you made the decision to ask me, the Bishop of the Midwest Region of Roman Catholic Women Priests to ordain you to the diaconate and one of you, to the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. I have spoken with all of you and clearly heard you say, that God is calling you to serve the people of God within the frame work of our beloved Catholic Church and that asking for this ordination was the best and most holy way for you to answer this call. And so, with great joy we will proceed with these, your ordinations in a few minutes.

At this point of your journey, I encourage you to lay aside all fear, anxiety and worry. Put aside all confusion about validity or legality of these ordinations. All of you and the families and communities surrounding you, have experienced hardship and small crucifixions on your journey to this ordination day. But now, try to let go of these pains and let the words of our Brother Jesus' greeting which he used twice, sink deeply into your hearts: Peace be with you. Peace be with you. Jesus was aware of the frailty and fear of his beloved community. Therefore, right after he extended to them the greeting of peace, after he showed them the marks of crucifixion, after he sent them, he breathes on them and with his breath gives them an important gift, the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am sure the members of the early community did not know instantaneously what the call was all about, where they were supposed to go, whom they were supposed to serve. The knowledge of how to respond to the call unfolded slowly and over time. The first and second readings of today's liturgy help us understand the substance of the call and the sending on a deeper level. The essence of Jesus' commandment, the center of the

response to the call, the core of what was and is important in the church, is love.

While the letter of John is more general in describing this love, the reading from the Acts of the Apostles is much more precise: They were of one mind and one heart. Everything was owned in common. The Apostles preached the resurrection and were respected by all. No one was needy among them, because those who owned property sold it and gave the money to the Apostles who shared it with those in need.

Is this a realistic blue print for a Christian community? Scripture scholars have disagreed whether this description is even close to the historical reality of the early church. There are stories in the Acts itself that contradict this narrative of harmony and bliss. Again and again in the history of Christianity, groups have tried to duplicate this attempt of the community to live Jesus' command of radical love and they seem to have fallen short. Our own Roman Catholic Women Priests movement, with its short history of 10 years, is a good example.

But today is not a day to contemplate failure. One of you told me that today's readings, especially the post- resurrection story, inspire her to believe that the impossible is possible.

For me the description of the community in the Acts of the Apostles is not so much a blueprint, but a challenge, an inspiration, a vision, a guide post to follow.

What, then, are you five today, and with you, all of us called to do, to bring our beloved Church closer to the ideal of unity and love. Each one of you needs to figure this out on your own, much as Mary Magdalene, Peter, Mary or James had to do. Trust the Spirit. She will guide you. She has already started good work through you:

There are new vibrant, inclusive Catholic communities under your leadership, in homes, in other Christian churches, in a park. The elderly are cared for with love and respect, including an older Catholic priest. The Gospel of justice, inclusivity, love and compassion is preached by you to all, to straight or GLBT people, black or white, wealthy or poor, male or female. I heard several of you express that you are called to serve those on the margins. I have heard you say that service to others with compassion

is at the center of your response to the call. As one of you said: My life is not my own.

The story we heard today in the Gospel of John is preceded by one of my favorite Gospels: Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord. There Jesus tells her: "Go tell my brothers". She goes and tells them: "I have seen the Lord".

Mary Magdalene has become the patroness of our movement. Therefore, I encourage you to go and tell the brothers, especially our brothers in the hierarchy, of your encounter with the risen Lord. Tell them to change their discussion about women to a discussion with women. For us, religious liberty means to be able to discuss issues like women's ordination freely and respectfully. Tell our brothers to shift the emphasis away from the bedroom to the sacristy when they are dealing with women's issues. I would imagine that celibate, elderly male bishops have more expertise in the latter than in the former. We women are capable of taking care of our bodies. We are capable of making our own decisions about them. We, however, need our brothers to acknowledge the fact that our bodies are worthy to stand close to the altar and lead the people of God in our sacred rituals, that we are called to service of the people of God just as they are. Tell the brothers that you are ready to work on a church community where the spiritual faith, the ethical life and the social commandments are in sync.

Our brothers do not seem to hear us, just like they did not believe the women initially who brought the good news of the resurrection to them. Until they are ready and open for the good news, let's not be idle, do what God has called you to do. Serve the people of God to your fullest capacity. And may our Mother God empower you and strengthen you with her Spirit.