

Homily for the Ordination of Josie Petermeier, 5/4/2014

“God will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.”

Jesus asked her “Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” And a little bit later, he said to her: “Mary” and she said: “Rabboni.”

And finally: “For God has shone in our hearts that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining in the face of Christ.”

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today we are gathered to celebrate the ordination of our sister Josie to the diaconate. As it is our custom in the Midwest Region, Josie chose the readings for today’s ordination liturgy. I would like to focus my reflections on the three verses I just read to you. I believe these reflections will not only help us to gain insights into the way Josie plans to respond to her call. They may also assist each of us to clarify our own responses to the movement of the Spirit. Because for us Roman Catholic Womenpriests the celebration of an ordination is not in any way a celebration of clericalism and hierarchy. Rather, it is a celebration of the priesthood of all believers, a royal priesthood that was bestowed on us on the day we were baptized, bestowed on all of us regardless of our gender, sexual orientation, race or class.

Dear Josie,

I vividly remember the delightful conversation you and I had a few weeks ago when you explained why you had chosen these specific readings for your ordination. You told me that God sings to you and that you were looking for a scripture passage where God sings. You only found one, the one from Zephaniah which we just heard: “God will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.” I did not share with you at that time that I had no idea who Zephaniah was. After doing some research, I was relieved to learn that he is only one of the Minor Prophets and it is only slightly embarrassing for a bishop to admit that she does not remember ever knowing of his existence. I will, however, remember Zephaniah from now on, because the idea of a God who sings to me is a powerful and beautiful one. There are many examples in our Judeo-Christian tradition of people of all walks of life praising our God in song. Martin Luther declared that singing is triple prayer. But these images depict us earthlings sending our songs to heaven. In the verse you picked, Josie, the Almighty sings. God’s voice is warm and joyful. I bet, she is a mezzo soprano. And she sings with so much joy, because of you.

What a wonderful way of a godhead to communicate her delight over her creation. There are various ways to respond. One can simply listen attentively like a child who is calming into the lullaby of her mother. One can dance or allow oneself to be carried into holy trance, like the mystics. One can answer in song and sing a duet with the Holy One. The most important thing is to allow God’s song to carry you and to trust that your limitations, your fears, even your sinfulness are held by a power much greater than you.

In the Gospel we find another dialogue, a dialogue between our brother Jesus whom the Holy One had raised from the dead and a bewildered, grief-stricken Mary Magdalene. “Why are you

weeping”, Jesus asks her. Some scripture scholars have commented that it is interesting that the first words of the risen savior are: “Woman, why are you weeping?” “For whom are you looking” he continues. But she does not recognize him. Only when he calls her name, does she realize it is her beloved Rabboni.

In a few minutes, I will call your name, Josie. I will call you in persona Christi, representing not only our brother Jesus, but also the community. You know for whom you are looking. You have had this dialogue with God many times. The Spirit has called you and you have answered. You have already shown by your life and witness that you take the words Jesus told Mary very seriously: Go tell the brothers and sisters that I am ascending to our Abba God. You, too, have seen the teacher and are filled to the brim with the good news.

What will happen in a few minutes when I and later members of the community will lay hands on you will not be a magical moment that will turn you miraculously into a deacon. Rather, as Karl Rahner describes it, it will be a moment when we as church celebrate the grace surrounding us and deepen our understanding of the mystery within and beyond us.

You told me, that you had chosen the reading from the second letter to the Corinthians because you appreciate the image of the “earthen vessel”. It describes to you the humility we need to understand that we carry the treasure God has given to us despite our frailties and short comings. This image of the earthen vessel keeps us focused on the important fact that it is not our but God’s power that makes all things new. There is another great image in that short reading: The Holy One has shown her light into our hearts that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ.

Dear Josie,

The three readings you have chosen are powerful guidelines specifically for your ministry as a deacon, a ministry of service and proclamation. But they are also guidelines for all of us how to answer whenever the Spirit calls us. At the center of all three readings is the art of communication, the art of connecting.

It all starts with the Spirit. Sophia speaks and sings in many different ways and communicates through different vessels. We are asked to be still and know that She is God. For us Christians the most authentic way the Holy One speaks to us is through the voice of our brother Jesus, the resurrected Christ. With his death and resurrection, his teachings, with his life of service to his Abba God and to his brothers and sisters, he laid out a master plan for a holy life. He and the Spirit left us the community of the Church, truly an earthen vessel, but holy never the less. You are called to serve this church by being a prophetic voice for reform. You have accepted this call and I thank you in the name of the community.

Let us thank God that He has sent us a leader who also calls for reform of our church by emphasizing the core- message of our brother Jesus, to see him in the faces of the least of his brothers and sisters.

Josie,

You have a gift of connecting to those around you and connecting them to each other and to the Holy One. You have used that gift in service to various communities. You have started to develop your gift of proclaiming the Good News.

Today's readings encourage you and all of us to listen to the voice of the Spirit. Let that joyful voice penetrate deeply into your hearts. The readings encourage us also to respond to the voice of our brother Jesus when he calls us by name, and respond like Mary Magdalene did. And carrying that light of joy and trust in our hearts will enable us to bring it to all corners of the earth, even the dark ones. It will enable us to make known the glory of God in the face of Christ and in the faces of the least ones of our brothers and sisters.

And don't forget to listen when She sings to you and try to sing along as well as you can.

Amen.