

# Homily for the Episcopal Ordination of the Reverend Nancy Meyer, RCWP

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Wisdom 7: 7, 24-30

Psalm 116 *The Humility of God by Ilia Delio*

John 13: 1-15

Today is a day of infinite joy and also a day which speaks volumes about our Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement's great trust in the Holy Spirit. In the ancient yet timeless tradition of our church, we are here to celebrate together the continuity of our apostolic faith. A new bishop has been elected to carry on the leadership of the Midwest Region of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, to serve as a great symbol of the unity of God's people in the apostolic faith. Once again, we have come together as the people of God to reflect on *our collective* responsibility to live out and model the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth in all of our ministries—that is to say, in all that we do. And we are here to pray with our new bishop-elect as she assumes the responsibility of leading this Midwest community in its gospel mission.

As is our custom in Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Nancy, the ordinand, has chosen the readings for this liturgy of ordination. As we have heard, they are rich in spiritual depth, and they give us great insight into the character of Nancy, and of her clear understanding of the graces she will need for her ministry as

regional bishop. In Nancy's choice of readings, we glimpse a woman of deep prayer, a woman who seeks to bring Christ's compassionate presence to all the world.

Today's readings speak to us especially around four themes. The first is the theme of *wisdom*. Now, wisdom is that marvelous sharing of God's self with us that comes to us when we allow ourselves to be open, indeed empty, listening and waiting, contemplating the *what* and the *whom* we share life with. Our reading from the Book of Wisdom tells us that wisdom permeates all that lives....and indeed speaks of the *power* of God in all! Wisdom mirrors for us the *dynamism*—the *kinetic energy*...of the power of God...as seen in ourselves and other creatures. Wisdom, we are told, "enters holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets." And again, "Wisdom never gives way to evil." Wisdom is the will to walk with God...to let God enter into our very selves.

A second theme is *gratitude*. The chosen verses from Psalm 116, of course, extol gratitude—gratitude to the God who calls people forth to serve...to serve in *freedom*.

And this brings us to a third and related theme, the theme of *commitment* "I will fulfill my vows to you in the presence of all your people!" exclaims the psalmist.

One who is called to serve the community as bishop is indeed called to fulfill his or her vows faithfully in the presence of and accountable to all God's people.

The fourth and perhaps most important theme is that of *humility*. Both the passage from Ilia Delio's book, *The Humility of God*, and that from the thirteenth

chapter of John's gospel, make clear the message that, without humility—without being in touch with one's real self and with one's relatedness to and interdependence with all that is, one cannot truly know how to serve. So, to be *divinized*, as Delio has put it, is to be Christ for others in all Christ's humility and compassion, going to the margins, touching the untouchable, willing to lose one's life for the sake of the gospel. Only then, can we, as ministers of the gospel, share the consciousness of that divine spark that we are as images of God, with the world. We must be contemplative. We must listen and learn and find God over and over again in the ordinary—even in the scary. We must, as Jesus tells us, wash each other's feet! And it doesn't stop there with an *aha moment*. **We are on a journey – a journey together.** We must find our way forward together— together with those with whom we agree and with those with whom we have *some* differences.

Having considered what footwashing means as Jesus taught it to us, I want to shift gears now for a moment. I want to ask a question. I want us to consider what our role as Roman Catholic Womenpriests and RCWP-led communities might be vis-à-vis the mission of our pope of just over a year now, Pope Francis? After all, Nancy is becoming a bishop in a movement not officially recognized by the Vatican. In fact, the previous two popes have declared that the non-ordination of women is now an established doctrine of the church, and, to date, Pope Francis has not said otherwise! Does the episcopal ordination of Nancy or any of us women bishops here today represent a rebellion against the authority of the pope or the archbishop of Indianapolis, or any other Roman Catholic ordinary in terms of their role as chief teachers of the apostolic faith? We do not believe so, and here is why.

We do not seek to in any way change the apostolic faith which we all share and cherish. However, we in RCWP have a mission, and that mission includes challenging the validity of the canon (#1024) in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, which states that priestly ordination is reserved to baptized male persons. We ordain women in apostolic succession to claim the right of women who are qualified and called to seek ordination as priests. In doing so, we honor the spiritual authority of women alongside that of men, as Jesus did. We also seek the continued renewal of the church according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, a renewal which we, along with many, many faithful Catholics, believe has been jeopardized over the past 35 years.

**Now, with Pope Francis, we are experiencing a somewhat different attitude.** Pope Francis, over the past year, has publicly demonstrated a different model of ministry; a simpler style of leadership; a scaling back of the pomp of the papal office; an active orientation toward solidarity with the poor and oppressed; and, a stated willingness to listen and to learn from the community of faith. This is a welcome and wonderful thing! It is heartening to all who desire deeply a new beginning, - a new model of ministry, one that is less dependent on bureaucratic structures inherited from a monarchical era. It is a sign of hope for the future. **We in RCWP can resonate with all of this.** Indeed, it is a great boost to *our* mission which is to prepare and ordain women called to priestly ministry to serve in a renewed model which honors and values the principles of inclusivity and mutuality, and which is about the business of seeking the justice called for by the reign of God. We applaud Pope Francis' openness, and we pray that his willingness to dialogue will extend to women called to serve as priests.

So, what exactly does the movement within the Roman Catholic tradition called RomanCatholic Womenpriests have to say about the model of priestly ministry needed in the church in our times? What does our movement contribute at this time when our new pope wants to reform the way the church ministers? Many of you are already well acquainted with our RCWP movement, now eleven years serving in priestly ministry worldwide. (And, by the way, today, we rejoice that approximately 180 RCWP ordained women serve the People of God in 10 countries on four continents.) But for those who are not so familiar, I will now share a bit about how our movement seeks to answer the call to service in a renewed Catholic Church.

In our movement, one of the top priorities in our self-governance is to honor the spiritual authority of women, to honor the faith experience of women, and the history of women's service to the church and to the Gospel. We do this by giving all our members an equal voice in governance. And, recognizing that decisions affecting local and regional communities are best made at those levels, we operate on the *principle of subsidiarity*. We hold one another to mutual accountability to our vision and principles, and to spiritual authenticity and moral integrity consistent with Gospel values. We surely see ourselves as a renewal movement within the larger Roman Catholic Church, and equally importantly, as a communion of local and regional entities whose common purpose is to promote the ordination of women (and men) in full apostolic succession as **a matter of justice to the People of God, and faithfulness to the Gospel.**

Our vision includes the following pledges:

- To work for justice and the human dignity of all persons;

- To model a leadership of service and empowerment in all pastoral practices and activities;
- To model unity in diversity;
- To live in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed;
- To model inclusion and interdependence; [like our new Pope Francis, we call for open doors to welcome all; accordingly, we choose to ordain pastors who are not careerists! In fact, we are self-supporting].
- We pledge ourselves also to model non-violence and respect for all persons;
- To model a reflective and contemplative spirituality;
- And to live and walk humbly with God in the mystery of life.

In sum, inclusivity and empowerment of people are the core of our ministry, no matter with whom we minister. We know ourselves to be pastors to those on a journey as pilgrims moving toward the fullness of the life our loving God offers. We in Roman Catholic Womenpriests see our movement as a Spirit-filled movement that is fed by the insights of Vatican Council II, and that is *called by God to move forward from discussion into action – action always fed by contemplation*. **WE HAVE ACTED, and today, WE ARE ACTING, knowing that the purpose of our action is to give witness to a way of being church, and of ministering, that, far from going against the apostolic tradition, captures and proclaims the very heart of it.**

Nancy has said **YES** to serving as bishop for the Midwest region in this model of ministry. It is in fact a model she has embraced for some years already, as a pastoral associate of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, as well as deacon and. priest in RCWP-USA, Midwest Region. She now can practice

it as pastor to the pastors in the Midwest Region. She can do this, surrounded by many sisters and brothers who have also committed themselves to this mission. Our model of priestly ministry is focused on co-creating the reign of God here and now, by being open to many surprises as pilgrims on the journey on which God is leading us.

Today, Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Midwest Region calls forth Nancy Meyer to serve as regional bishop. She is called forth to lead in love God's community of *equal disciples* in the Roman Catholic Church.

The aim of our ministry is to recognize, to nurture and to rejoice in the exercise of *diakonia/service* by the *whole* People of God. We are truly grateful for our call to take part in the great reform of our beloved church—in its unity and its diversity.

Jesus said to his disciples in our gospel reading:

“What I have done, you must also do!”

In joy, let us indeed go forth together with and in support of Bishop-elect Nancy Meyer—called forth by the community and empowered by the Spirit.