

Priesthood Ordination 2023

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

✠ Wilton Cardinal Gregory,
Archbishop of Washington

Your Youth – what a happy gift it is today for all of us!
And it is a very happy day for these young men who soon will become our newest priests. Indeed, this is perhaps the joy that most fills the hearts of those of us in the Archdiocese of Washington – to rejoice in our young priests! Paul had to assure Timothy that his youth should not be a hindrance to his service of the gospel. Those of us who can no longer claim that title of youth find a special joy in looking into the faces of these six men and seeing a brighter future for the Church to

come. They are young but the message of the gospel they must serve is ancient.

The gospel of the Lord holds a promise that inevitably leads to holiness of life and subsequently empowers a man to witness to Christ in spite of the many challenges that inescapably come our way. Such a *promise* leads one to have the courage to challenge the prevailing standards of the time and to live only for Christ.

My sons, this day you will begin a new life for and in Jesus Christ. You already belong to Him through the sacramental bonds that you share with all of the other members of our Church. Just like your sisters and

brothers, you have been washed in the Waters of Life, anointed by God's Spirit, fed by and with the Lord Himself, and forgiven by the Merciful Christ. Today, the Church will call down the Holy Spirit upon you and ask that Priestly Grace be poured into your hearts for the service of God's People. In this new life for Christ, you will be configured to Him in His sacrificial offering of self. We want you men always to be made holy in the *truth of the gospel*.

A priest is a man who must live the *truth of the gospel*, seek the *truth*, preach the *truth*, love the *truth* and long for the day when all will know the *Truth*. God's Spirit assures the Church that we will possess the *truth* and

that possession will make us all free. Christ Himself of course is the *Truth* as he entitled Himself. He is fidelity itself. And from this day forth you each must seek to follow His own example of fidelity – fidelity to the promises that you are about to make in the presence of the Church to live in the same *sacrificial* way as did Christ Jesus. You are about to hand over your lives in imitation of Christ for the service of the Church that He Himself founded and continues to love until the end.

I thank all of the members of the families of these six men who join us this day to witness their ordination as Christ's priests. I thank in a special way the parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives of these six

candidates for your life-long love and support for them. Please continue to provide that strength of love and encouragement that will continue to be vitally important in their lives in the future.

A priest must pray each day of his life for the Church but always in very concrete and specific ways. My sons, the Church will soon come alive for you in the faces and through the voices of the people that you will encounter. The elderly and sick, the young and joyful, the couples and young adults who will fill your lives must also become the very images of the Church for which you must pray daily. In the Liturgy of the Hours and in your quiet reflective prayer time, you must

embrace these people and recall their expressed and unspoken needs and present them to the Father of us all in your prayers.

Today you become a member of the Presbyterate of Washington. It is a fraternity of sacramentally designated ministers who seek to care for the People of God with zeal, compassion, and hope. We are a diverse group of men who are – novices and veterans, native sons of this local Church and transplants from other communities and cultures. We are experienced and neophytes, adventurous and cautious, but all are priests of Jesus Christ summoned together through the

Sacrament of Orders to carry out the mission given to us by the Lord Himself.

Your Ordination today brings a special joy to the hearts of all of your brother priests in this local Church. We are joyful because your ordination is a reason for us to take heart in the commitment that God makes to the Church to provide pastors to tend the Lord's flock. Indeed, the entire Church of the Archdiocese of Washington is filled with happiness because we recognize the Hand of the Lord acting in our midst because of your willingness to become our priests.

You are about to enter into a new and very personal relationship with the Eucharist today. From this day forward the Lord Jesus will commit Himself to use your voice, your hands, indeed your very body to make His Body and Blood available for the People of God. Christ will give you authority over Himself so that He can be Eucharistically present for His people.

Today, as a man who knows his own weaknesses and sinfulness, you will be empowered to forgive the sins of others and to comfort and to encourage them in the name of Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Be gentle and merciful in exercising this ministry and remember to make use of it frequently in your own

lives as the best preparation for becoming the compassionate and forgiving confessors that Christ calls you to be.

Today, people will begin calling you *father*, even though you have embraced a life of perpetual chaste celibate love for the Church. You will become a *father* for people who are many years your senior, for people that you hardly even now know, for people who truly have little reason to trust you or to accept your desire to care for them. However, because you will represent Christ for them that alone will be sufficient.

Please never violate or forsake the trust that people will place in you because your weaknesses and failings will not merely be your own, but they will frequently impact the way that some people may even believe in or trust God. Always let your joy be visible in the manner in which you attend to the ministry of the Church. Such joy will be an unassailable sign that you know and love the God that you serve through the Priestly Office.

Always preach with conviction and with fervor so that you inspire others to believe in the truth of God's Word and abide by it in their lives. Be reverent in the way that you attend to the Church's rituals of prayer so that people are made aware that these sacramental signs

and gestures are really the very gateway to the presence of God that they are.

Today, our relationship changes. I have become your father, your brother, and hopefully eventually even your friend. Your promise of obedience and respect bind me to you and you to me as I hand over to you this day a share in Christ's Priesthood. Obedience and respect are the foundations of a relationship that we must work on together. The etymological meaning of the word obedience includes the task of listening – I must listen to your hearts, and you must listen to my initiatives to care for the entire Church throughout the Archdiocese of Washington. You must respect the

Office that I hold within the Church, and I must respect your dignity as God's sons. Together by listening to and appreciating one another, we will build-up the Church in love and in truth – as is the desire of Christ Himself.

Today you begin living a *truth* that will empower you to serve the Church with all of your heart. That same *truth* will sanctify and consecrate you and you in turn must strive to sanctify the members of our Church through your actions and by your example of living the Lord's Priesthood with fidelity. May the Lord who has begun a good work in you, bring it to fulfillment!