

Homily of Bishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv. of the Diocese of Savannah

(Given during the Mass of Ordination to the Priesthood of Friar Gabriel Mary Scasino, OFM Conv.
St. Philip Benizi Catholic Church, Jonesboro, GA – February 14, 2015)

Fr. James (McCurry), Minister Provincial of *Our Lady of the Angels Province*; my dear brother, Fr. John Koziol, Pastor; my dear confreres; my brother priests from the Archdiocese of Atlanta; dear family and friends of Friar Gabriel; and members of the St. Philip Benizi community:

This young man, **Friar Gabriel**, a son of St. Francis, is presenting himself today for Ordination to the Priesthood. Let us consider carefully the nature of the rank in the Church to which he is about to be raised.

While it is true that God has made His people, as a whole, “a royal priesthood”, our High Priest, Jesus Christ, also chose some of His followers to carry out publicly in the Church, a priestly ministry in His name. Jesus was sent by the Father, and He in turn, chose and sent the Apostles into the world. Through them and through their successors, the bishops, He continues His work as teacher, priest and shepherd.

Indeed, priests are established co-workers of the Order of Bishops, with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of God’s people.

As part of his preparation, Gabriel has seriously considered the step that he is about to take. As a priest, he will be molded into the likeness of Christ, the supreme and eternal Priest. He is to continue the ministry of Christ, the teacher, priest and shepherd.

By consecration, he will be made a true priest of the New Testament to preach the Gospel, to forgive sin, to sustain God’s people, and celebrate the Liturgy, **above all**, the Lord’s sacrifice.

Now, my dear brother, Gabriel, hold in your heart the words of our Father Francis who addressed the Friars in his community who were priests: “Whenever you celebrate the Mass,” Francis says, “you are to offer the Sacrifice of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ with purity and reverence, with a holy and unblemished intention, not for any worldly reason, or out of fear, or for love of anyone, and certainly not out of a desire to please people. But let all your will, with the help of grace, be directed to God, desiring to please only the Most High Lord Himself. For it is He who has given the command: ‘Do this in memory of me’”.

In this way, let what you teach be nourishment for the people of God. Let the holiness of your consecrated life be a delightful fragrance to Christ’s faithful, so that by word and example, **you** may build up the house which is God’s Church.

As our brother Francis of Assisi admonished his priests, “incorporate yourself into the Lord’s death and resurrection by making every effort to die to sin and to walk in the new life of Christ. As the Blessed Virgin Mary is honored because she carried the Lord Jesus in her most holy womb; as John the Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of Jesus; as the tomb in which Jesus lay is held in veneration, how holy, just and fitting must **YOU** be... who touch with your hands, receive in your heart and your mouth, and offer to others **Jesus** under the appearance of bread and wine.” Understand therefore, Gabriel, **what you do** and imitate **what you celebrate**.

When you **baptize**, Gabriel, you will bring men and women and children into the people of God. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you will forgive sins in the name of Christ and His Church. With **Holy Oil**, you will relieve and console the sick. You will celebrate the **Liturgy of Hours** and offer thanks and praise to God throughout the hours of the day, praying not only for the people of God, but for the whole world.

Gabriel, **you know** how some people in positions of leadership and authority, try at times, to make **their** importance felt. That must **not** be that way with you.

As a priest, Gabriel, you are certainly going to assume positions of leadership in the faith communities where you will serve. The Church needs you; she wants you to exercise wise and competent leadership.

But beware. Leadership and authority – even religious leadership and authority – can be a seductive, slippery slope. It is easy to lose perspective; to lose balance. It is easy to fall into the trap of self-centeredness.

I also pray that you never begin to believe that any authority or power you may have is rooted in yourself. **To believe that** is to open yourself to an insidious, destructive clericalism which leads to a life of self-seeking entitlement, not to one serving the common good of God's people. Ultimately, it leads to profound dissatisfaction, unhappiness and isolation. Therefore, carry out the ministry of Christ, the priest, with constant joy and genuine love, attending not to your **own** concerns but to those of Jesus Christ.

Gabriel, in our society today, for a variety of reasons, the role of the priest can often be confused. As you continue to strive to imitate the simplicity and humility of the poor man of Assisi, do not let yourself be caught up in either **your** perception of what a priest should be, or the misunderstanding and the unrealistic expectations and demands of how **others** believe a priest should be; simply be a friar-priest in imitation of Christ – nothing more and nothing less.

Finally, consciously and sharing in the work of Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, and united with the Bishop and subject to him and to your Minister Provincial, **seek to be an instrument of peace.** Bring the faithful together into a united family and lead them through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, to God the Father.

My dear son of St. Francis, you have been chosen by God from among his people to be His instrument and to act on behalf of His people, with respect to their relationship to God and to each other as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. On your part, this demands true humility and self-sacrifice.

Friar James (Minister Provincial):

Our Seraphic Father Francis was in awe that the Lord of the universe so humbled Himself that, for our salvation, He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread and a chalice of wine. “My brother, look at the humility of God and pour out your heart before Him. Hold back nothing of yourself, for yourself, so that He, who gives Himself totally to **you**, may receive **you** totally.”

Bishop Hartmayer:

Gabriel, like your confreres who have been ordained to the Priesthood, you must devote yourself to teaching and preaching in the name of Christ Jesus, the chief teacher. Share the Word of God with **all** people. Our Lord came so that His people might have life to the full. So share the Word of God with joy.

Friar James:

Recall what our Seraphic Father Francis said to St. Anthony of Padua:

“It pleases me that you teach...as long as you do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion.” Therefore, mediate on the law of God and His most holy Word; believe what you read, teach what you believe, and put into practice what you teach.

Like our Father Francis, let the example of your life be your homily and attract followers of Christ, so that by word and action, you may fulfill the mission given by the Lord to our Father Francis to rebuild the Church.

Therefore, you are to put on the mind of Christ and His Church. Humbly seek to grow in your understanding and pastoral application of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.

In your relations with the bishops and priests of the dioceses in which you will minister, remember the example and desire of our Father Francis. He used to say, “We have been sent to help the bishops and the clergy with the salvation of souls so that what might be found insufficient in them might be supplied by us. Everyone will receive his reward, not according to the authority he exercises, but according to the labor he does.”

Bishop Hartmayer:

Gabriel, always remember the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served, but to serve, and to seek out and rescue those who were lost.

Bishop Hartmayer and Friar James:

O most beloved brother,
Hear the voice of Christ Jesus, the High Priest and Good Shepherd
And the voice of our Father Francis:
Great things you are promising;
Greater are being promised to you.
Observe the former;
Aspire to the latter.

May the Lord grant you His peace. Amen.