

**Homily for the Ordination of Reverend Brother Nathan Marzonie and
Reverend Brother Leland Thorpe of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary
to the Sacred Order of the Priesthood
Saint Mary Church
Alton, Illinois**

August 13, 2022

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brother priests and deacons, beloved consecrated women and men religious, family members and friends of our *ordinandi*, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is *good* to be with you and with Our Lord on this magnificent day to witness and celebrate the ordination of Reverend Brother Nathan Marzonie and Reverend Brother Leland Thorpe of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary to Christ's priesthood. This is a glorious occasion for all of us, and indeed for the entire Church.

For those of you who do not know Brother Nathan or Brother Leland very well, I offer some background information to help you get better acquainted with our soon-to-be newly ordained priests!

Nathan Marzonie was born thirty-three years ago, which is a rather auspicious age to be ordained as an *alter Christus*! He is the fifth of six children born to George and Lisa Marzonie. His hometown is Flushing,

Michigan, and his home parish is now San Pedro Catholic Church in North Port, Florida. He graduated from the University of Michigan with Bachelor of Science degrees in Molecular Biology and Clinical Chemistry. He attended St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. Brother Nathan's hobbies are hiking, reading science fiction, cooking or trying strange foods, learning foreign languages, playing cribbage or backgammon, playing and listening to music. A little-known fact about Brother Nathan is that he was a tongue-twister champion in grade school! What he is most looking forward to as a newly ordained priest is celebrating the Sacraments and reaching out to non-practicing and not-yet Catholics.

Leland Thorpe was born thirty-six years ago to Leslie and Chuck Thorpe. He is the first-born of their two children. His hometown is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and his home parish is Saint Paul Cathedral in Pittsburgh. Leland graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and a Master of Science degree in Robotics. He attended St. John's Seminary. His hobbies are running, reading, ultimate frisbee, and Taekwondo. What Brother Leland is most looking forward to as a newly ordained priest is being an instrument of God's Merciful Love, especially in the Confessional. Brother Leland notes that his

paternal grandfather was a medical missionary, and his maternal grandfather was a protestant minister. Three of his aunts and uncles are protestant ministers as well, explaining that “it’s something of a family business!” Leland was received into full communion with the Church and confirmed at the Easter Vigil in 2010, while completing his master’s degree in Pittsburgh. He adds that, so far, he is the only Catholic in his family. I note his hopeful addition of the words, “so far.” We will be happy to receive more members of your family into the Catholic Church with open arms whenever they are ready to do so!

It is very fitting that our Ordination Mass today takes place on the anniversary of the death of Father Raffaele Melis, a priest of the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has been declared a Servant of God. As noted in our worship aid for today’s ordination Mass, “Fr. Raffaele was a beloved Oblate priest at the parish of St. Helen in Rome. During the second Allied bombardment of the city, he went out to assist the victims from a train bombed near the parish church. After the bombers returned for a second pass, his body was found with the vial of holy oil he had been using to anoint the wounded and dying still grasped in his hand. His cause was opened in 1995 for an “exemplary priest and courageous witness.” We pray that our

newly ordained priests today will be inspired by the exemplary life of Servant of God Raffaele Melis as they receive their priestly ordination on the day we commemorate his venerable witness!

To be chosen by God to live the life of a priest is a thrilling prospect! He has called you to a life of service and spiritual adventure; but I can tell you from experience, it is also a call to enormous responsibility. You will soon be entrusted with the exercise of a sacred power, conferred by the Holy Spirit, which can come only from Christ himself, for it is a share in his own priesthood.¹

Christ is the only true priest; you will exercise His ministry, acting in his person. “You will have the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself.”² You will stand where Jesus stands, and do what He does. Or perhaps more precisely, He will be doing those things now through you.

The priestly vocation is a mystery, wherein a wondrous exchange takes place. A man offers his humanity to Christ, so that Christ may use him as an instrument of salvation, making him as it were into another Christ—an *alter Christus*. Unless we reflect upon the mystery of this “exchange,” we will not grasp why men such as yourselves would sacrifice everything for

Christ to stand in his place and do what Christ will do through you to gather his people to Himself.

In his book on Priesthood, *From the Depths of Our Hearts*, His Eminence Robert Cardinal Sarah elaborates on what this means for those who have accepted this call to priestly ordination: “We [priests] continue His presence on earth. Like Him, we must watch, pray, and be steadfast in the faith. He was willing to have need of us priests.” Indeed, the Cardinal continues, Christ has need of you – of all of you. You will be consecrated to Christ, and so every part of you belongs to Him and will be employed by Christ to further His Kingdom.”

“Our hands,” explains Sarah, “consecrated by the sacred chrism, are no longer ours. They are His in order to bless, forgive, and console. They are reserved to Him. If sometimes celibacy seems to be too burdensome, let us look at the hands of the Crucified. Our hands, like His, must be pierced so as to keep and hold nothing greedily. Our heart, like His, must be open so that everyone finds welcome and refuge there.”³

Opening our hearts means also being open to a change of heart, to be open to the transformative power of God’s grace. Here lies the power and fundamental requisite of the priest: that he be a radically converted disciple

of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us priests encounter the Lord Jesus and hear God speak to us those words He spoke so long ago to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I dedicated you ...” (Jeremiah 1:5).

We know ourselves to be loved and chosen to be His own. We come to recognize in ever greater degree our dependence on God, so we spend time with Him in prayer, meditate on His words, and live a life of Christian charity, that we ourselves may be strengthened, encouraged, and emboldened to live as His disciple. As a result, Jesus continues to abide with us, and to invite us into an ever-deepening communion with Him.

But for the serious disciple, and particularly for the priest, that will not be enough. Having found the key that unlocks the book of life, being loved by the One who creates, delivers from sin, and sanctifies, we will not want to go alone. We will desire to invite others to join us and to experience the very same thing. Every priest is a missionary priest, for every place is mission territory.

It is the life of prayer that fuels this life of ministry. For unless a man is a radically converted Christian disciple—one who, in gazing upon the cross, knows himself to be looking at the great truth at the center of human

history – he will not be able to bring to the world, through his ministry, the truth that “God so loved the world that He gave His son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

This will be now your primary concern – eternal life – not only for yourselves, but also for your parishioners. You will be a shepherd, entrusted with and concerned about the souls of those in your charge. The Sacrament of Holy Orders will conform you to Christ the Head in such a way as to aid you in this momentous task.

One such way, as a priest, is that you will be a servant to Christ and steward of His sacred mysteries, standing where he stands in the Divine Liturgy – at the place of sacrifice.⁴ Liturgy is primarily the action of Christ who, by His self-sacrifice in the praise and love of His Father in union with the Holy Spirit, raises us into a profound experience of the Trinity. By proclaiming the word and celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, you will place yourself at the service of the priesthood of the faithful, supporting and enabling the laity of offering right worship to God.

You too, like Christ, must offer yourself to the Father. When you repeat Christ’s sacred words, “This is my body which will be given up for you...” you must intend it for yourself too, submitting your own body, heart, and

spirit to God as Christ the High Priest did. In short, you too must imitate the victimhood of Christ, offering all that you have and are for the transformation and salvation of others. Eagerly desire it, as Christ did, for it is not in material means or sophisticated programs that bring pastoral success. No, it is the holiness of the priest that produces the sanctification of his people.

Your presiding in the person of Christ at the liturgy makes you the shepherd of His flock, for it is the one who leads prayer and worship that receives the authority to govern the parish. Your share in the priesthood of Jesus then, as the Catechism states, “is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church.”⁵ There is no room for clericalism, pretentiousness, ambition, jealousy, or the unwillingness to relate to others given into your care.

Instead, we imitate the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. We take interest in those on the journey; they have a story to tell – of grace and how God has worked in their lives. We would do well to listen in order to better understand the movements of grace and the goodness of God. Visits to Catholic schools, parish religious education, as well as to hospitals,

nursing homes, and homes of parishioners unable to travel, will put you in daily contact with the God who rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep. Opportunities for confession, anointing of the sick, providing counsel, and reconciling people and relationships to God and his Church will not be lacking. They will bring fulfillment and meaning to a priest's life, and will be just some of the ways you will preach the Gospel, which is our primary responsibility.

Remaining faithful to your priestly promises will also preach a strikingly counter-cultural message to a culture hostile to the Catholic Faith and weighed down with a profound spiritual boredom. You will be a sign of contradiction—living as one set apart from the world for the sake of the world. You will stand where Christ stood, in sincere obedience to the Father with a radical self-gift in celibate love that testifies to the truth: that self-gift, not self-assertion, is the path to joy and challenges today's narcissism and self-absorption. "Lived in integrity, and happily, priestly celibacy is a powerful sign to the culture...that there are things worth dying for—including things worth dying-to-self for."⁶

You are, and will be made a more profound and paradoxical reminder to a confused and melancholic world of what is true, good, and beautiful.

You will empower Christians to become saints and fulfill their destiny and thereby fulfill your own.

So do not be afraid of opposition. The apostles encountered it, as did Jesus, and they continued telling the truth. Determine what the next step is for the people you serve and help them take it as you take the next step in growing closer to God yourself.

He has chosen you to follow Christ, and you will be consecrated to stand where He stood to do what He did in service to His Church: to mediate between God and creation, to preach the Gospel, to raise up those in need, to reconcile, to forgive sins in His name, to encourage, to pray fervently, to offer His sacrifice; in short: to be His priest. It is an adventure and a sublime destiny!

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1538.

² Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*: AAS, 39.

³ Robert Cardinal Sarah, *From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy, and the Crisis of the Catholic Church*, 139.

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 4:1.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1547.

⁶ George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism*, 141.