

13A 2017 SML
MT 10:37-42

- ✓ In sacred scripture, our Blessed Lord set the example for his priests to move from one assignment to another;
- ✓ In the sacraments, Holy Orders provides priests with the gifts necessary to minister in more than one priestly assignment;
- ✓ And in the Church, a bishop may see fit to transfer a priest. Personally, transferring from one parish to another is probably one of the most difficult things a priest has to do.

Echoing last Sunday's homily, Matthew is the most ordered of the four gospel accounts. Matthew divides the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth into five sections and alternates each of these five sections with five sermons. This evening's (morning's) gospel is taken from Matthew's sermon on missionaries. In Matthew's sermon to the missionaries, our Blessed Lord gives his missionary disciples:

- ✓ a commission: Go after the lost sheep of Israel. 10:6
- ✓ an instruction: Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. 10:8
- ✓ a strategy: Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, no second tunic or sandals or walking stick. 10:9

- ✓ a prediction: People will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues; you will be led before governors and kings. 10:17
- ✓ an exhortation: Do not be afraid of them! 10:26
- ✓ a second prediction: Do not think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. 10:34
- ✓ and finally, a promise: And I promise you that whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones because he is a disciple will not want for his reward. 10:42

This evening's (morning's) gospel ends with that promise. And as soon as the sermon was finished, our Blessed Lord went out as a missionary "to teach and to preach in their towns." 11:1 In scripture then, Jesus set the example for his priests to move from town to town, from parish to parish.

From the Apostolic Exhortation "On the Formation of Priests" by Pope John Paul II:

The spiritual gifts which priests have received in ordination does not prepare them merely for a limited and circumscribed mission, but for the fullest, in fact the universal, mission of salvation to the ends of the earth . . . By the very nature of their ministry, priests should therefore be penetrated and animated by a profound missionary spirit and "with that truly Catholic spirit which habitually looks beyond the boundaries of parish, diocese, country or rite to meet the needs of the whole church, being prepared in spirit to preach the Gospel everywhere . . ." 18

In the sermon during an ordination, the bishop gives the ordinands:

- ✓ a commission: to share in the priesthood
- ✓ an instruction: to teach, govern and sanctify
- ✓ a strategy: to believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach
- ✓ a prediction: You will bring men and women into the people of God through Baptism; you will forgive sins in the name of Christ through penance; you will relieve and console the sick through holy anointing
- ✓ an exhortation: to remember the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve
- ✓ and finally, a promise: well done good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord.

In the sacraments, Holy Orders provides the priest of Jesus Christ with the gifts necessary to minister in more than one priestly assignment. These are words that Father Roy heard just a month ago, that I heard 28 years ago, and at many ordinations since.

From the Second Vatican Council Document, "Bishops in the Church:"

Should the good of souls or the need or advantage of the Church require it, the bishop may transfer a parish priest

from his parish, in which he renders useful service, to another parish or to any other church office whatsoever. 19

In the Church, a bishop may see fit to transfer a priest to another parish. Yet personally, transferring from one parish to another is one of the most difficult things a priest has to do.

The vow of celibacy enables the priest to dedicate himself to God and his people. His spousal instinct is fulfilled, to a certain extent, in his love for his parishioners. His paternal instinct is fulfilled, to a certain extent, in his love for the children he guides and students he teaches. They call him "Father." The priest takes advantage of the celibate life and dedicates himself to his parishioners. And he is fulfilled by his ministry. Such was the case for me as I've been transferred from one parish to the next: from St. Rose of Lima Parish in Freehold to the Chancery, to St. Joseph in Toms River, to Holy Trinity in Long Branch, to St. Benedict in Holmdel and here at St. Mary of the Lakes in Medford. Priestly transfers are a way of life. I liken my love for my parish to the love my brothers and sister have for their spouses and their children.

Every time I transfer from a parish, I cry. I remember when I went back to St. Rose that first year after I was transferred for their Confirmation, I went into the sacristy at the end of the Mass and just cried because I missed that parish because I

didn't have a parish. I was working in the Chancery. When a priest is transferred from his parish, at his own initiative or in obedience to the Bishop, it is as if his family has been taken away from him. The priest grieves for his parish. For months after my transfer from Freehold, when I went home to visit my family, I was envious of my brothers and sister because they still had their families and I didn't have mine.

And you begin again in the new parish. By and large, the duties are the same and the lifestyle is similar, but you know very few names. You can't even find the post office. You talk to the ushers about the weather. Slowly but surely, you eventually find a home in your new parish. You learn names and faces. You find the post office. And you talk to your people not about the weather, but about things personal. Slowly but surely, the priest's spousal instinct and paternal instinct are fulfilled again in his new parish.

Pray for Father Carlos as he begins in Bayville, and Father Roy as he begins here at St. Mary of the Lakes, and welcome him. "He who welcomes him," says Christ, "welcomes me. And I promise you that whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones because his is a disciple will not want for his reward."

Priestly transfers are warranted in scripture, in sacrament,

and in the Church. But personally, I know this much:
transferring from one parish to another, from one assignment to another, and starting in a new one, is probably one of the most difficult things any priest will ever have to do.