

Make Eucharist your Mission!

Homily for the Ordination of Father Lalo Barragan for the Priesthood in the Diocese of Yakima, Friday May 23rd 2014 at Holy Family Catholic Church,

Yakima Washington

Isaiah 61:1-3; Romans 12:4-13; John 17:6, 14-19

Peace be with you! “I gave them your word,” Jesus tells his followers, and the world hated them...” With joy we celebrate Father Lalo Barragan’s ordination. But what harsh shock that at a joyful liturgy, the Church would select such a harsh Gospel for our consideration. “I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.”

Scripture scholars refer to this section of St. John’s Gospel as the “high priestly prayer” of Jesus. These words from the Gospel of St. John are among the last words in this Gospel spoken by Jesus immediately prior to his arrest and subsequent execution on the cross. So why such a demanding and hard Gospel for such a joyous event as an ordination?

Precisely because the words of our priestly service today align to the priestly Word of Jesus spoken prior to his death on a cross. You – Lalo – already know this. You not only know the terrible fear of family and friends due to the deportations of those without document, but you know the way the separation and loss from loved ones can lead to loneliness, addiction, drug abuse and domestic violence. You not only know the strain that a lack of money can place on our families in minimum wage jobs, but you have seen the bitter fruits of anger, arguments, betrayals and resentments that grow from the scarcity of financial resources.

We have a rather dark but humorous saying in English. I am not so sure it translates well into Spanish. But it goes like this: When the pie gets smaller, the table manners change.

Yet this is precisely the place where we walk as we enter into the one and eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. Acting in his person and serving as his head, we place all of the world’s evils and wrongs, blood-letting and resentment upon the paten along side the bread and wine offering them as the bloodless sacrifice that brings reconciliation and salvation to our people.

In one of my favorite passages from our retired Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI’s book, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Pope Benedict notes that the world in which Jesus preached is not so different from the world in which we live today. Today, Syria is divided by civil war. At the time of Jesus, Syria was a conquered province of the Roman Empire. Today, tensions are high in Israel and Palestine with the constant threat of insurrection and “intifada” threatening world peace.

“What did Jesus bring if not world peace, universal prosperity, and a better world? What has he brought?” asks our retired Holy Father. “The answer is very simple: He has brought God. He has brought us God who formerly unveiled his countenance gradually, first to Abraham, then to Moses and the Prophets, and then in the Wisdom literature... He has brought us God, and now we know his face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world....faith, hope and love. He has brought us God and it is only because of our hardness of hearts that we think this is too little.” (p. 44)

Is God too little for us? With that probing insight, our retired Holy Father circles us back to this altar and this bloodless sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the Eucharist. As holy priests of God we – in Jesus’ name – bring our people God. In the smallest elements of unleavened bread and grape wine, we speak God’s very words over these elements so they become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ for our people.

In doing so we provide the strongest possible reminder that in the midst of a world of “hate” and “hardness of heart” that God is never too small. God draws near precisely in our littleness. God draws near in our darkest moments, our harshest human conditions, especially when sin and evil seem so steep and tempting.

Because God is never too small, when we celebrate Eucharist we bring our people everything they need to transform the path of suffering and struggle in their lives into the royal road of a deeper and more lasting human happiness that the world’s evil or injustice can ever conquer.

So, Lalo, as you receive Holy Orders into the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, allow the priestly prayer of Jesus in this seventeenth chapter from St. John’s Gospel to be your prayer too! Bring everything from our people – their sufferings as well as their joys – to this altar of sacrifice. Make Eucharist your mission! In doing so discover the fathomless honor and responsibility bestowed upon you to bring our people the very presence of God. Peace be with you!