

HOMILY FOR THE EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF BISHOP MICHAEL PHAM AND BISHOP FELIPE PULIDO

Church of St. Thérèse of Carmel, Sept. 28, 2023

The word of God presented to us today centers upon three pivotal divine calls in the history of salvation: The call of God the father to Abraham to leave behind his homeland and journey in faith; the call of Jesus to the disciples to leave behind their nets to follow Him; and the call of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles to leave behind their fears and move forward in faith and confidence to proclaim the Gospel to all of the world.

Taken together, these three calls frame the powerful moment that we celebrate today in the Diocese of San Diego and the witness that you, as new bishops in the Church, are called to provide in the Church.

Both of you, Felipe and Michael, heard the call of Abraham during your teenage years, leading you to leave behind your native land and come to the United States.

For you, Michael, the call of Abraham came in the form of the economic devastation and political and religious oppression that followed the end of the war in Vietnam. Your family sought freedom, opportunity and stability, but the only pathway to that freedom lay in a perilous journey through which your family came in stages to the United States. You and your sister and brother endured a horrific passage that confronted you with the realities of terror, robbery and shipwreck. And then you came to the arms of people of faith in Minnesota who embraced you as their own and showered God's grace upon you. As your family was unified once again in this new land, all of you

understood that it was God who had called you to this journey and carried you through, bringing you ultimately to California.

For you, Felipe, the call of Abraham came in the decision of your family to come to the United States in search of economic opportunity in the state of Washington, where your father had labored many years before. Like Abraham, you grieved leaving the life and culture of your home in Michoacán. Like Abraham, you understood that God would be with you profoundly on the journey. And, like Abraham, you came to understand that your new home was graced and beautiful in countless ways.

Felipe and Michael, you are true sons of Abraham in our midst. You have seen God's grace in the journeys that have formed your life. You are immigrants to our nation, in a local Church which is centered so deeply upon the faith and compassion of our immigrant communities. You understand that the vitality of our Catholic faith here in California is inextricably linked to the cultures and traditions that animate our hearts and move our souls. The tapestry of your lives, nurtured so deeply by your families over the whole of your lifetimes, is a template for the evangelization of the world that lies at the center of the Church's mission.

In your new ministry of leadership in the Church, you are called to witness to these very realities. For, as leaders in the Church, you must help us all to understand that, in our own individual pilgrimages upon this earth, it is God who is launching us, God who is guiding us, God who is surrounding us with every blessing that we know and cherish.

The Call of the Disciples

Today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew conveys a moment which is central to the life of any priest: the call of Jesus to the disciples. It is imperative for us to realize that this call to the

disciples is, in its essence, a call to accompaniment, to coming to understand the Lord Jesus Christ by walking with Him, listening to Him, suffering with Him, trusting in Him, becoming holy through Him. And in turn, it is a call to accompany others in the Church and the world as Jesus has accompanied us.

For you, Felipe, the initial call of Christ to the ordained priesthood came early in life, in Mexico. But the Lord's call to you came with overwhelming force many years later, when your pastor in Yakima asked you to help care for Father Jerry Corrigan, a priest of Yakima, who was dying in the parish. It was in walking with Father Corrigan in his illness, in accompanying him in the darkest moment of his life, and in seeing the witness and service of his priesthood, that when he invited you to become a priest yourself, you experienced Christ the Lord coming to you on the seashore, calling you to a life of service and sacrifice. Truly, your very priestly vocation arose from a generous and sustained act of accompaniment and compassion.

Michael, Jesus beckoned to you for many years, but it was only after college, when you were working as an aeronautical engineer, that the Lord's invitation crystalized. For you, as for Felipe, your vocation crystalized through an act of accompaniment. Despite a full-time job and being enrolled in a master's degree program in engineering, you spent your weekends as a catechist with the Vietnamese community at Good Shepherd Parish, walking with young people through their journeys of faith and questioning. It was in these moments that you realized you had the capacity to teach the Word, to form hearts, to lead women and men to the Eucharist. And it was in these moments also that you heard the Lord coming to you on the seashore and inviting you with overwhelming grace to enter into the priesthood.

Michael and Felipe, as accompaniment was at the root of your priestly vocation, so has it been at the very center of your priestly lives. Michael, with your wonderful dedication to accompaniment

and collaboration, participation and invitation, you have renewed the ethnic and cultural communities of our diocese with stunning success. Felipe, as vocation director and vicar for clergy for the Diocese of Yakima, you have used your gifts of prayerfulness and kindness, organization and vision to help Bishop Tyson accompany the priests and People of God in the Diocese of Yakima toward unity and grace. And for both of you, accompaniment has been at the core of that ministry which has been closest to your hearts – pastoring the People of God in the parishes that you have led.

You are now becoming bishops and, in doing so, you take on new dimensions of Christ's call to the disciples. For as successors to the Apostles, you are called to place at the center of your ministry the three Apostolic mandates: to preach the Word of God in its fullness and truth; to help sanctify the People of God through the sacramental life and the call to holiness; and to govern the community of faith, so that it might fulfill its mission in the life of the world. These new responsibilities cannot lessen in any way the devotion to accompaniment which has characterized your priesthood. Indeed, the call to episcopal service must deepen your efforts to walk with men and women in the sufferings and the joys of their actual lives; to embrace the fallen, the marginalized, the angry, the questioning; to bring the authentic healing amidst polarization that can only come through embracing those with whom we disagree. To be a good bishop, you must truly journey with God's flock as Pope Francis has urged us: walking sometimes at the front to lead; walking sometimes in the middle of the flock to experience the realities of daily life; and walking sometimes at the rear to embrace and walk with those who are struggling to keep up.

Only in this way can you, as bishops, point to the most fundamental meaning of today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew: that it is, first and foremost, not a call to priesthood or the episcopacy, but rather a call to discipleship in Christ which embraces the whole People of God equally in challenge

and in grace. It is the priesthood of our baptism that is our truest identity and which unites us with every woman and man in the life of the Church we serve. And it is in accompanying Christ and one another that we come to understand what God's call to us at any moment truly means.

The Call of the Holy Spirit to the Universal Church

Today's second reading from the Acts of the Apostles portrays the utter transformation of the Lord's disciples as they experience the overpowering grace of the Holy Spirit. They had been gathered in the Upper Room, filled with fear. The Lord had deserted them. The enemies of Jesus lay in wait. Christ had entrusted a mission to them which seemed unfathomable and overwhelming. The confidence that they had felt upon seeing the Risen Lord had now dissipated.

And then the Holy Spirit of God came upon them, and they were transformed. The spirit of fear was replaced by a spirit of trust in God's plan that never left the Apostles for the rest of their lives. The mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ Jesus and Him crucified became clear in their eyes, a source of strength and energy rather than one of doubt and despair. They went out to preach, to heal, to accompany in every land of the world they knew. They prayed and discerned together in those moments that called for new pathways and difficult theological and spiritual decisions for the early Christian community. And they never faltered because they trusted that the Holy Spirit was guiding them always.

Felipe and Michael, my brothers in episcopal service, you are called to be bishops at this pivotal synodal moment in the life of the Church. The whole of the Catholic community throughout the world is being called to a fundamental renewal. We are called to deepen our communion with one another, to broaden participation in the life of the Church and to reclaim and reimagine that same mission which Christ gave to the disciples when He walked the earth.

Nourished constantly by the Word of God and the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of the Christian life, we seek to build a Church that is discerning and prayerful, dedicated to the treasury of Catholic faith, collaborative and inclusive, humble and forthright, evangelizing the cultures of our world while reaching out to all those on the margins, and especially to the young, who are drifting away from the life of the Church.

As we continue this process of renewal which has begun throughout the world and focuses next month on the synodal meetings in Rome, fears have arisen about the wisdom and the ability of the Church to undertake this new mission. They echo the fears of the Apostles who waited in the Upper Room, unsure where they were heading and what God was calling them to do. But then the Spirit came upon them and they were renewed, and trusted that God was truly leading them.

Bishop Pham and Bishop Pulido, you must become prophets of the synodal Church that is dawning and the renewal to which we have been called. As the heirs of Abraham, you must proclaim that we are all on a journey in this earthly pilgrimage, and that we must never become so attached to the places where we are most comfortable that we fail to see God's call to change. As heirs of the disciples who heard the call to accompaniment from Jesus as He stood on the seashore, you must work to place the "kerygma" at the very center of the preaching and teaching of the Church, and reflect the pastoral embrace of Christ to all of God's people: in their moments of grace and heroism, in their moments of sinfulness and failure, and in their moments of deepest searching for the Lord's presence.

Finally, my brother bishops, as heirs of the Apostles who waited in fear in the Upper Room, you must proclaim the same trust in the Spirit of God in the life of the Church that animated Peter and the Apostles on Pentecost day and must animate the Church in every age.