

Mass of Priestly Ordination of Curtis Berube and John Duane Carmichael

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

[*Acts* 12: 1-11; *Psalm* 34; *2Timothy* 4: 6-8, 17-18; *Matthew* 16: 13-19]

Tonight, the Archdiocese of Edmonton gathers in a spirit of profound thanksgiving and great joy. We rejoice in the gift of two new priests, Curtis Berube and JD Carmichael, who will lead and serve the people of God in this local Church. Curtis and JD, you have been journeying for a long time under God's grace toward this moment. At some point along your life's path, you came to say, with St. Peter and the Church, that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ, the Son of the living God. From this inner conviction, you knew that you could not do otherwise than follow him. With you, we are all grateful to the Lord that his summons has brought you to this moment of ordination to the ministerial priesthood.

Joy tonight is also especially felt by your very proud parents and family members. I want to say a special word of thanks to Nicole and Leo and to Karen and David. Thank you for the witness of the faith you have shown to your sons, and for the encouragement you have given them to be open to the call of the Lord and ready to follow wherever that might lead. We are all very grateful to you and share your joy.

The usual liturgical expressions of our joy are restricted tonight due to the pandemic. This is disappointing, of course. However, I'd like to encourage all of us to receive this situation not with grudging acceptance but with an openness to how the Lord is speaking to Curtis and JD directly through it. The very fact that restrictions are impacting a mass of ordination contains within itself a crucial lesson for our two ordinands, and indeed for all of us. I will return to this in a moment. First, though, let's direct our attention to the mission for which Curtis and JD are about to be ordained. What that mission is becomes clear as we reflect upon the Gospel passage from St. Matthew, together with the witness of the two apostles whose memory and mission we honour on this solemnity.

The dialogue recorded by Matthew between Jesus and his apostles takes place at Caesarea Philippi. The venue itself is highly significant for us. It is located about twenty miles north of the Sea of Galilee, far removed from any of the sites where Jesus and his followers normally spent time together. The fact that Jesus led his disciples, on foot, to this out-of-the-way location tells us right away that this is a very deliberate action on the part of our Lord. His intention begins to emerge when we consider that, at Caesarea Philippi, there was a cultic shrine to the pagan god Pan; it was a site of public devotion. The Lord's purpose becomes clear at the moment when, in the very heart of this place of public pagan worship, Jesus poses a question publicly about his own identity: "Who do the people say that I am; who do you say that I am?" In posing the question of his identity publicly, Jesus is summoning his disciples to give a public response in the midst of a people engaged in false worship. The disciples begin to answer by citing all the wrong answers in circulation: some say Elijah, some say John the Baptist and so on. When Jesus asks about their

personal response, Peter gives the right answer – publicly: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The parallels of this ancient scene with our current state of affairs are obvious. We live in the midst of a society marked by its public worship of false gods: materialism, relativism, hedonism, and the like. Curtis and JD, these are the times in which Jesus has called you. To this setting, Jesus has deliberately led you. Like it was among the population long ago, there are today many wrong public answers in circulation regarding the identity of Jesus. What we confront today, though, are not only responses that misidentify him, but also ones that presume his identity is of neither interest nor consequence. Within this situation, you are called as priests to give public profession to the truth of Jesus Christ, and, as shepherds, to lead the people entrusted to your care to do the same.

The task is daunting, filled with challenges and obstacles. From the testimony of Saints Peter and Paul, we know that it was ever thus for those charged with the proclamation of the Gospel. The chains that held Peter fast, the numerous guards that stood close watch over him, and the heavy iron gates that separated him from the Christian community symbolically represent not only the earthly forces that array against the Church but also the inability of unaided human strength to prevail against them. Paul reminisces about his years as an apostle in terms borrowed from military combat and athletic competition, in order to emphasize the difficult struggle that awaited Timothy and anyone commissioned to preach the Gospel, and the strenuous effort that must be poured into its proclamation. Yet neither Apostle would say that they accomplished the task entrusted to them by their own strength. On the contrary, Peter awakened to the realization that his release from prison was by God’s power, and St. Paul acknowledged that at all times the Lord had stood near to give him strength.

This brings us back to the lesson to be learned from the liturgical restrictions within which this ordination is taking place. The point to observe is this: the pandemic has led to the imposition of constraints that have forced all of us to live within limits. Curtis and JD, of all the instruction you have received throughout your many years of seminary training, the most important lesson for you to learn for the effective exercise of priestly ministry is to live within limit; not the limitations externally imposed but those that arise from human weakness. The gift of the Holy Spirit given in ordination to configure you to Christ the High Priest and Head of the Church will enable you to do by God’s power what you could never accomplish on your own (cf. *CCC*, 875). Trust not in yourself but in the Lord who calls you. Remember that he always stands by you, giving you strength and removing every obstacle to your public proclamation of the truth of his identity to a world that needs the Gospel.

In that spirit of complete trust in the help of God, stand now and profess your commitment to follow Christ, the Son of the living God, as his priests.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
St. Joseph’s Basilica
June 29, 2020