

SERMON PREACHED FOR THE SILVER JUBILEE OF REV. DAVID W. CRAMER. SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH, SUSQUEHANNA, PENNSYLVANIA, JUNE 12, 2016:

If I were to meet a priest and an angel, I should salute the priest before I saluted the angel. The latter is the friend of God; but the priest holds his place...When you see a priest, you should say 'There is he who made me a child of God, and opened heaven to me by Holy Baptism; he who purified me after I had sinned; who gives nourishment to my soul'....what joy did the Apostles feel after the Resurrection of Our Lord, at seeing the Master whom they had loved so much! The priest must feel the same joy at seeing Our Lord whom he holds in his hands...The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. When you see the priest, think of Our Lord Jesus Christ...

These thoughts from the "Little Catechism" of the Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney, the patron of all parochial clergy, sets the stage very well, I believe, for this wonderful celebration of Christ's Priesthood in the Silver Jubilee of Fr. David Cramer. The very beautiful, very lofty thoughts of the St. John Vianney in the nineteenth century were brought much closer to home earlier in the twenty – first century by the current Archbishop of New York, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, some years ago, when he was serving as Rector of Rome's North American College, Alma Mater of Father Cramer, and many of us from the Diocese of Scranton. In one of his Rector's Conferences, Cardinal, then Monsignor Dolan defined very clearly what the Catholic priesthood really is:

The Priesthood is a call, not a career; a redefinition of self, not just a new ministry; a way of life, not a job; a state of being, not just a function; a permanent, lifelong commitment, not a temporary style of service; an identity, not just a role. We are priests; yes the doing, the ministry is mighty important, but it flows from the being; we can act like priests, minister as priests, function as priests serve as priests, preach as priests, because first and foremost we are priests! Being before act!!!

What, precisely, does Cardinal Dolan mean? To answer that, we think of what happened to Fr. Cramer in Saint Peter's Cathedral in Scranton twenty – five years ago this month. As the Bishop laid hands on Father, and his classmates in Ordination, each man was profoundly changed – we use a term from Philosophy to describe it – he, they were ONTOLOGICALLY changed, that is changed in their very being. Each of us at Baptism received an indelible character; that character was intensified when we were

Confirmed; but the priest, in addition to the characters of Baptism and Confirmation, has received yet another indelible mark configuring him to Christ the High Priest, so that he may act *in persona Christi capitis*, in the person of Christ the head. This priestly character is indelible, uneraseable, permanent, and a character every priest carries into eternity. What we are speaking of, my dear friends, is profoundly mysterious, a concept which totally eludes the grasp of our limited human intellects, and yet, this profound mystery is the very, very unique Christ life of the priest; it is a configuration which totally sets a priest apart – not in a superior sort of way – anything but. This configuration to Christ, this new priestly identity allows every priest: *TO DISPENSE CHRIST'S SACRAMENTAL MYSTERIES; TO TRANSMIT THE TRUTHS OF CHRIST IN HIS CATHOLIC CHURCH; AND TO SHEPHERD CHRIST'S PEOPLE IN HOLINESS.*

We are all here today to thank Almighty God for the wonderful way Fr. Cramer has fulfilled that mission for the past twenty – five years! Father, you are a man to whom the words *SENTIRE CUM ECCLESIA* may truly be applied – for you surely think with the teaching church, you are a man deeply committed to the church's Magisterium, her teaching voice for all Christ's Mystical Body. This has been very, very evident in every parochial assignment you have received in this diocese: your insistence on sound catechesis, your emphasis on solid doctrine in your own priestly teaching, your impressive dedication to Catholic devotional life. For all of this, and most of all for your very solid priestly witness, we all thank you with the greatest sincerity.

I am not suggesting for a moment that any of this is easy. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen put it very well years ago when he wrote

The dialectic between the sublimity of the vocation on the one hand, and the frailty of the human clay on the other, is a kind of crucifixion. Each priest is crucified on the vertical beam of the God given vocation and on the horizontal beam of .....a world that so often beckons to conformity with it.....

Still, a man is continually strengthened by God's grace which enables him to daily renew his priestly commitment, and he is always fortified by so many elements which comprised his priestly formation. Fr. David, you have been so fortunate to study in the Eternal City of Rome, truly the city of our faith. The city in which Peter and Paul bore their final witness to Christ; the city in which so many saints lived and worked, and are buried; and most importantly, the city in which the Vicar of Christ resides – whoever he is, at whatever time he has been chosen to govern the church. Father David, in our time, St. John Paul II was gloriously reigning; Joseph Ratzinger was Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith – such a humble man, who would always stop in the Piazza of St. Peter's to have a conversation; soon to be St. Teresa of Calcutta would so often visit her homes, and meet many of us from the College; from the inscription atop the chapel of the College on the Janiculum Hill, we were reminded that all who lived and worked in that college could easily, from that spot, gaze on the Vatican Hill, and be reminded of the person of our Holy Father, to whom we look always for guidance, strength, and the clearest roadmap of life. This North American College has been in the business of training men for the Priesthood since 1859, and, very interestingly, when the centuries old house on Humility Street, now our Graduate House, the Casa Santa Maria was being renovated to serve as a seminary, in 1858, a collection was taken up in all dioceses of the United States to defray the many costs involved. At that time, some three years before the commencement of the American Civil war, Michael O'Connor, a graduate of Rome's Urban College, was serving as the first Bishop of Pittsburgh. He wrote a letter to the Catholic faithful of Pittsburgh, explaining the reason for the collection, and then added this very poignant thought

They who have drawn deeply at the source of Apostolic truth, will be likely to carry that truth pure, and in plenty, to others. They, who have learned to love Rome, not only from principle, but also from the tenderest, holiest local attachments, will be likely to bind the faith and affections of others to this sacred, immovable center of evangelical truth. .... Let a priest who has known the Pope, for example, but utter his name fondly and with reverence, and he will often have preached a more effective sermon on the meaning of the church than he could in a week's discourse. Devotion can itself breed devotion, and love engender love.

Though every priest's formation differs, this nineteenth century Bishop has focused on something which resonates loudly and clearly with many of us, and especially, with today's Jubilarian. Every priest can take great pride in his years of priestly preparation, since they all coalesce in the same purpose. St.

Therese of Lisieux wrote beautifully of this to a young priest correspondent

....your lot is truly beautiful, since Our Lord chose it for Himself, and first put His own lips to the cup which he now holds up to yours. A Saint has said 'the greatest honor God can pay to anyone is not to give him much, but to ask much from him. Jesus then is treating you in a privileged way. He wants you to begin your mission already and to save souls....let us work together for the salvation of souls. We have only the one day of this life to save them, and thus to give Our Lord some proof of our love. The tomorrow of this day will be Eternity, when Jesus will reward you with the hundredfold of those sweet and lawful joys which you are giving up for Him.....

Fr. David, you have been proving the truth of her words for the past twenty – five years, and may you continue the same for many, many decades to come. Of you, our college motto, *FIRMUM EST COR MEUM* is surely true: your heart has been steadfast, and, through the intercession of Our Lady of Humility, patroness of our college, it will remain steadfast throughout all your priesthood.

" A priest will never be able to understand the full significance of the power that has been given to him at Ordination", George Basil Hume, late Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, England once wrote, " years later, a priest's faithfulness and meditation should have uncovered for him treasures of understanding that he could not have dreamed of as a young priest". Certainly our Jubilarian feels that today, and all of us priests here would much, much concur with Cardinal Hume's final point

Whatever the circumstances of the church at any moment in history, can we ever doubt the dignity which is ours by Ordination? Can we ever belittle the heavy responsibility that has been laid upon our shoulders?.....

David, you have appreciated the dignity, and carried the burden very well, and for that, all of us here today join in wishing you AD MULTOS GLORIOUSQUE ANNOS!!!!!!!