



Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland
Bishop Emeritus
Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Ordination of Ernest Davis

St. Peter's Church
Kansas City, Missouri
November 23, 2002

First Reading: Isaiah 61: 1-3
Second Reading: Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-13
Gospel: John 21: 15-17

In many ways this ordination of Ernest Davis to the priesthood is no different to the three other ordinations in our diocese this year.

But for me and for our diocese it is a first; it is unique although for the Church further afield it is no longer unique: even as I speak a similar ordination is being celebrated in the diocese of Providence, Rhode Island. (David Louis Stokes.) The difference is in relationships – most priests come from warm loving families, but Ernest Davis is an intimate part of a warm loving family and this includes Valerie, Margaret, Ernest and Jan: and courtesy of Rome's Pastoral Provision that family remains united as Ernest embraces the priesthood within our tradition.

This ordination rite, permeated by the word of God and enriched by sacred symbolism, tells its own story. It echoes the mystery of the vocational call when it contemplates Jesus adopting the life style of the Isaian prophecy in the proclamation of the "glad tidings", the healing of stricken hearts and the realization of that genuine freedom which is the birthright of all God's children. This universal call to holiness is not merely an invitation to an inspiring idealism. When lived, day after unrelenting day, it attracts and motivates others to seek ministry as Christ initiated his in Nazareth's synagogue. How appropriate for the Davis family that Sister Anne Brooks could be present this morning to recall those Isaian messianic qualities which graced her own vocation and, magnet-wise, draw Ernest to ministry and to priesthood.

And then there is Paul, confronted and forever changed by Christ on the road to Damascus, now begging the Ephesians to strive for unity, not, you may notice, through force or violence, but through the irresistible power of a love fortified by humility, gentleness and patience. Wonderful as this ordination is, it is also a sad reminder of our Christian divisions. As followers of Christ we were all meant to be one family with "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." This is neither the time nor the place to speak about reformations and counter-reformations, to detail the shedding of Christ's indivisible garment. We are all prodigals and there is plenty of blame to go around. We have even fashioned rituals which vie with each other in ways which foster division rather than unity. Paul mentioned hope and there are signs that the fending should be left to spoiled children. Isn't it time for all to seek the Father anew, to rush into his outstretched arms where there is room for all of us and more besides? We must believe that the impelling grace of the Holy Spirit can bring us closer together even if it is only one faltering step at a time. We pray that, despite our stumbling, the Lord will lead us in the right direction.

Against these panoramic centuries-laden backdrop, Ernest and his family had to find their way. In God's providence we all have different mountains to climb and deserts to cross. Chaucer's pilgrims all had the same destination but each had a different biography. It was not a running away. The hiker does not despise the road which has brought him to the inn. The foundations were there and they were good: good enough to depend on so that Ernest and Valerie could respond to God by following a different road. I'm sure it wasn't always easy – there were no infallible angels but there were the prayers and goodwill of lots of fallible friends. Being comfortable in ministry is, humanly speaking, an appealing attraction but God often seems to demand something more. He never promised that discipleship would be easy.

What brought Ernest to this sanctuary today? In his selection of the gospel reading for this Mass I think he betrayed the answer. He met Peter. He met the Fisherman. He met the Rock and all that such implies – the man who was chosen by Christ, molded by Christ, encouraged by Christ, upbraided by Christ, deputized by Christ, forgiven by Christ and loved by Christ. Peter, whose face, generation by generation, became that of Leo and Gregory and Pius and John Paul. "*Ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia*" – "where Peter is, there is the Church," a bewilderingly simple statement with a bewildering number of interpretations. One simple answer – he met Peter, and by happy coincidence Ernest will now be ordained in a church dedicated to that same Peter, scenes from whose life are graphically depicted as you raise your eyes above the altar.