

Fr. Stephen Lawson

First Mass Thank You Speech

I would like to take this moment to offer a brief reflection and thank some people for this wonderful weekend.

Why such a stark image for a holy card? The painting “Ecce Homo” is an unusual image for an ordination holy card. The image of Christ is not a comforting one to look at and contemplate. The painting though is sending an important message to all of us. For the newly ordained, the depiction of Christ is one of sacrifice. The priest stands in front of the community offering his whole life to bring people closer God. It is there in front of Pilate when Christ begins his final ministry. He is beginning his journey to the cross, which will ultimately result in our salvation. For priests, Christ is the example of the sacrifice that we are called to imitate. Every day priests should be prepared to sacrifice themselves for the people of God. For all of us, Christ is standing there on the portico stripped of his clothing waiting for us to respond to his message. Christ is waiting for us to accept the Gospel. Whether you are a priest, a monk, a professor, a college administrator, a stay-at-home mother, a college student, a teacher, a plumber, a grandfather, a grandmother, a painter, a nurse, a lawyer, an accountant, an engineer... Christ is waiting for us to make Him the center of our lives. Christ is calling each of one us to join him on the journey to Calvary. He is waiting for us to pick up our cross and follow Him.

I would like to take this moment to thank the many people who helped put together this weekend. I would like to thank Melinda Lott in the Communications office and Keith Morse in the Print Shop who designed and printed the various programs and holy cards that have been used. I would also like to thank Bishop Peter Libasci, Fr. Augustine Kelly, Fr. Jason Jalbert and the many altar servers who organized and assisted at the liturgical services. I would like to especially thank Eric Barmani, Fr. Bede Camera, Caresse Mailloux, and the many choir members who provided the wonderful music we have heard. Thank you to Br. Isaac Murphy, Tom DeRosa, Br. Ignatius Membrino and Ann Shevlin who served as readers. Special thanks to Fr. Denis Robinson and Br. James Jensen who are here

representing St. Meinrad Seminary and Archabbey, a place that has grown to be very special to me the last four years. I would also like to thank the monastic community, especially Bishop Joseph, Abbot Mark, Fr. Cecil, and Br. Isaac, who have guided and supported me during my priesthood formation. And thank you to all the monks for putting up with me on a daily basis. Thank you to the Saint Anselm College community for supporting me throughout this journey. Thank you to all of you for attending yesterday's ordination and this morning's mass.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. The start of every Christian journey begins at the baptism font and I am standing here today because of a decision my parents made 32 years ago. I would now like to present my parents with two gifts. To my father Frank I give you a stole that represents my first confession. In the sacrament of penance we experience God's justice, mercy and love. It is through the father that the priest is first learns these traits. And so the purple stole used to hear confessions, where the priest reconciles the faithful into God's love, is presented to my father. When the priest's father dies he is buried with the stole, and when he is raised from the dead the father will present the stole to Jesus Christ and say, "My son, too, shared in your priesthood." To my mom Sue I present to you the cloth that I used to clean my anointed hands with. The cloth represents the burial shroud of Christ that protected His body during the 3 days in the tomb. The cloth is given to my mother because she was my first protector, during my time in the womb. The cloth is a reminder of the love and protection that God has for all his people. When my mom dies, which hopefully is not anytime soon, she will be buried holding the cloth so that all in Heaven and on Earth will know she is the mother of a priest. When she is raised from the dead she will present the cloth to Christ and say, "My son, too, shared in your priesthood."

As a middle child if eternal salvation does not now make me the favorite son then nothing will. Please continue to pray for me that I may become worthy of the promises I have made and may always imitate the High Priest Jesus Christ.