

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
RITE OF CANDIDACY
WEDNESDAY, 31ST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME, NOVEMBER 8, 2017
SACRED HEART SEMINARY, HALES CORNER, WISCONSIN**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

How fitting it is that we have this Gospel from Saint Luke, which addresses the demands of discipleship, particularly as some of you today receive the Rite of Candidacy. This morning I spoke about the new *Ratio Fundamentalis*, with its emphasis on discipleship and configuration, and about the heart of the priest – a heart detached from the things of this world and attached to the Lord and His people.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus states three conditions necessary to be His disciple: to love Him more than anyone else and more than life itself; to carry one's cross and to follow Him; and, to renounce all one's possessions. Jesus sees a great crowd following along with His disciples. He wants to make it quite clear to everyone that following Him is demanding and cannot depend on enthusiasm or opportunism.

Reflecting on this passage and the radical demands of discipleship, Pope Francis said:

The disciple of Jesus renounces all his possessions because in Jesus he has found the greatest Good in which every other good receives its full value and meaning: family ties, other relationships, work, cultural and economic goods, and so forth. The Christian detaches himself from all things and rediscovers all things in the logic of the Gospel, the logic of love and service. (POPE FRANCIS, ANGELUS ADDRESS, SEPTEMBER 8, 2013)

To be a disciple and, further, to be a priest requires careful consideration and discernment of some questions: Who is Jesus for me? Is He my true Good? Is He truly "Lord"; does He take first place in my life? Is Jesus like the sun around which the planets (all those persons, places, and things in life) rotate?

Overcoming the obstacle of being self-referential is no easy challenge, but you who are here today are willing to follow Jesus as Lord and to deepen your commitment daily to Him. Some of you will today receive candidacy, publicly manifesting this commitment. The rite of candidacy was developed by Pope Paul VI with his *motu proprio Ad pascendum* to replace the minor order of tonsure. But what is candidacy?

First, it is an offering on the part of the candidate - a manifestation of his will. *Ad pascendum* describes candidacy as the ritual whereby one "who aspires to ordination ... publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the Church...so that he may exercise a sacred order."

In Genesis 22, Abraham accepts God's challenge and is ready to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. Abraham makes his offering freely and unconditionally. Today, candidates say: "Adsum."- Present. In candidacy, the bishop calls the candidate by name, inviting to come forward. He invites but does not command. The response - "Present" - is left to the candidate's

generosity. Therefore, each person here, especially the candidates, might ask: How generous am I? Do I offer myself without conditions?

While candidacy is not yet an assent to Orders, it is a way of publicly saying, “*Here I am Lord, send me.*” (Is 6:8) This “Present” can only be said in humility, conscious of one’s own weaknesses and waywardness, knowing that the difficulties and responsibilities of the priesthood lie ahead. One should expect challenges. In today’s Gospel, when Jesus speaks of following Him, He knows very well that He is headed up to Jerusalem, where he will undergo His Passion. Each day, even in the face of difficulties, we need to renew our “*Adsum*” – I am present and ready to carry my cross.

Second, the rite of candidacy represents an acceptance by the Church of this offering. The Church selects and calls the candidate. The Church enrolls him among the candidates for diaconate and priesthood. In the candidate, this should stir up appreciation of the gift of one’s vocation, recalling on Jesus’ words, “*It was not you who chose me but I who chose you*” (John 15:16) or the words of the Lord to Jeremiah, “*I claimed you for my own before I fashioned you in your mother’s womb.*” (Jer 1:5)

Third, candidacy imposes duties upon the candidate to care for his vocation and to foster it in a special way; at the same time, the Church provides spiritual assistance for him to do this and to submit to God. The rite of candidacy is the first commitment, helping the candidate to discern his vocation. It establishes a “spiritual bond” between the Ordinary and the candidate and the local Church.

In this commitment, there is a renunciation of the spirit of the world. Candidacy doesn’t change one’s baptismal status, but it invites the person to reflect more deeply upon baptism and discipleship. It is an invitation to a more profound commitment by submitting to God. This means renouncing the spirit of this world as in baptism, when each person was asked: *Do you renounce Satan? And all his evil works? And all his pomp?*

Relying on God’s grace to heal and save, candidates should reflect on their weaknesses and attachments and should ask: What presently keeps me from being a good candidate or the priest that Christ wants and the Church needs? Have I tried to practice this renunciation freely and lovingly to the best of my ability?

Searching for the answers to these questions, even if they are difficult, is a sign of growth and maturity. In a way, candidacy marks the transition to the configuration stage. As the *Ratio* states, it “is an invitation for him to continue with his formation, in configuring himself to Christ the Shepherd, through a formal recognition on the part of the Church.” (CONGREGATION FOR CLERGY, *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS*, DECEMBER 8, 2016, 67)

Already, the men who will receive candidacy this evening have demonstrated an inner freedom and maturity, in behavior, thinking, and sincerity of intention. Now, they seek to deepen their commitment to Christ, first as disciples and, God-willing, later as priests, configured to Christ. We give thanks to God for them, offer them our sincere congratulations, and promise them the support of our prayers as they continue to respond to the voice of Christ, who says, “*Follow me.*”