

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Homily at Vespers on the Vigil of the Episcopal Ordination
of the Most Reverend Neal J. Buckon
(21.II.11)

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It was First Friday in the spring of 1959 and a classmate and I made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament exposed in our parish church on the way home from school. We stayed as long as first graders might and then left the church. As we went out a side door we saw the formidable principal of the school, Sister St. John, O.S.U. beckoning us. My neighbor rushed across the busy Cedar Road. Reflecting, I thought whatever mistake I made on Friday afternoon would only be worse on Monday morning. Also, being the youngest of five, I knew that Sister St. John recognized me and would certainly find me at home.

Perplexed at what my offense could have been—for no other reason would the principal be summoning us—I learned that one of the four altar boys scheduled for adoration had not arrived. A substitute was needed and I was elected. Sister Margaret Mary found a cassock short enough for a first grader and I was introduced to a relationship with the Eucharistic Lord and service on the altar. So important was the devotion and respect for the Holy Eucharist, that even the absence of one altar boy was deemed a lacuna to be filled at any cost. So important is the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist that this Archdiocese insists that there be a Blessed Sacrament Chapel on any installation where a Catholic Chaplain is assigned.

So this evening it is fitting that we keep a brief vigil before the Most Blessed Sacrament and pray the official prayer with which the Church sanctifies each day so as to beg an abundance of divine blessings upon Bishop-elect Buckon and the ministry he will undertake. At the same time we will invoke divine blessings upon the symbols of episcopal office.

St. Paul reminds us what apostolic ministry is all about: preaching the truth, allowing the light to shine forth in the darkness. That has always been a challenge and continues to be so today. For this reason the book of the Gospels will be opened over the new bishop's head tomorrow. "Those writings inspired by Almighty God and identified and transmitted over the centuries by His Church must fill you from head to toe. You must be imbued with that word so that whatever comes from your mouth will be an expression of what you have

read and heard. You will have a special opportunity to deepen the faith of those to whom you are sent.”¹

You, just as all of the clergy here, know well that “we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.” We are well aware of our weakness and failings. We have all too many reminders of our need to grow and mature in the ways of the Lord.

It is good that this chapel is too small to welcome all who join in our collective prayer. It means that we recognize the importance of invoking divine assistance upon our son, brother, cousin, friend, and co-worker who tomorrow will be ordained to the fullness of the priesthood. I wanted you to come here for this prayer, because this chapel is really the center of the archdiocese. There is no cathedral, but every weekday Mass is offered in this chapel and our faithful, benefactors, and needs are remembered.

The chapel is also more beautiful than it was a short time ago, because of furnishings from some churches in the Cleveland diocese. The monstrance itself was originally at the Brothers’ residence of Cathedral Latin High School and is loaned to us by Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in South Euclid. It is part of the patrimony of St. Margaret Mary Church where both the Bishop-elect and I began our priestly ministry.

It is fitting that we gather in prayer so that its personal and collective elements merge into one action. As our Holy Father taught recently, “prayer, on the one hand, must be very personal, a uniting of myself with God in my innermost depths. It must be my struggle with Him, my search for Him, my gratitude for Him and my joy in Him. Yet it is never something private of my individual ‘ego’ that does not concern others. Praying is essentially and also always praying in the ‘we’ of God’s children.

“In this ‘we’ alone are we children of *Our* Father, which the Lord taught us to pray. This ‘we’ alone gives us access to the Father. On the one hand our prayer must become more and more personal, must touch and penetrate ever more deeply the nucleus of our ‘ego’. On the other, it must always be nourished by the communion of those praying, by the unity of the Body of Christ, in order truly to shape myself on the basis of God’s love.”²

Tonight, then, we are one in our prayers for this priest called by the Holy Father for service to the faithful of a global archdiocese. The role is not easy. Travel will be constant. The challenges of serving and yet respecting the limitations of a strained budget are very much the realities of the ministry the Bishop-elect will undertake. Even in our contemporary society where communication is seemingly so simple, he will bring the personal presence of the shepherd to our men and women in uniform and their families,

¹ Broglio, Homily at ordination of Bishop Spencer, 8.IX.10.

² Benedict XVI, Homily for Episcopal Ordinations, 5.II.11

principally in the Western Vicariate. The more efficient we become, the more we are numbers in a great machine, the more precious is the physical presence of the pastor who calls each one by name and shows them the path to life without end.

We bring these thoughts and intentions before our Lord in the Eucharist this evening. We are glad that He is here to listen to us and to assure us of His blessing for our undertakings. We lift up our minds and hearts and recognize that we are not alone. Regardless of the challenges, the weight of our burdens—pastoral or otherwise—the Lord never abandons us.

Finally at the conclusion of Benediction I will invoke the blessing of Almighty God over the ring, miter, and crosiers that Bishop-elect Buckon will use in the solemn celebrations of his new ministry. While the ring officially symbolizes his marriage to the ancient See of Vissalsa in what is now Algeria, it will be a constant reminder that he is now the fifth active bishop incardinated in the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA. It will be a reminder of his fidelity and service to his spouse, the Church. May he see in it an invitation to pray for those entrusted to our care.

The miter is an ancient symbol of the bishop's office. It recalls the vesture of the high priest at the temple in Jerusalem. It is another reminder of the fullness of the priesthood you are about to receive.

Finally there is the crosier or pastoral staff. Just last Thursday night at Sheppard Air Force Base little boy asked me the significance of the staff. I told him a little about the shepherd's crook and the bishop's obligation to guide his people to the fullness of life. The precocious eight-year old seemed to be satisfied with that explanation. While it was not initially the symbol of jurisdiction, it has come to be so understood. Your jurisdiction in the Western Region of the Archdiocese will be vicarious. At the end of a long pastoral visit in some remote installation, as you lean on the crosier, it will remind you and everyone else that the pastor cares tirelessly for the flock.

Many things have changed since 1959. In most places servers do not watch in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. However, it is certain that we still show reverence and honor in a special way the Lord present body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. We still come into His Presence with our needs, deepest desires, and most fervent prayers. We come this night to intercede for our brother Neal James Buckon who tomorrow will be ordained a bishop in the service of this Archdiocese in whose headquarters we now gather.