

# FORUM

## Ordination of Priests

*Sermon preached at the ordination of priests, January 8, 1977 by*

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Through the gift of God's grace which was given me—for his power is at work—I was made a servant of the gospel. I, who am less than the least of all saints, was given the special grace to announce to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of the Messiah and to make all men see how the secret is administered (by the Messiah) that was hidden from the ages in God the creator of all things.

*Ephesians 3:7-9*

May the words of my mouth  
And the meditation of my heart  
Be always acceptable unto you  
O Lord my strength and my redeemer.

Greetings to all of you who have come to take part in this service of ordination. It is for all of us here a moment of high drama. There are such moments in every historical event of any significance, and while we make the effort, as I do now, to capture the moment in memorable words we usually fail. What is said may not be long remembered. What is done today will have an impact upon our understanding and practice of the ministry of the church for a thousand years, and beyond. And, while we recognize that this ceremony today has a significance far beyond similar ceremonies held throughout the church in other times, we are also aware that in a very deep sense this is not different from what the church has always done. In almost every generation, whether Catholic or Protestant, the church has agreed on one thing about its ministry and priesthood—that it is not the laity or bishops or other clergy who call individual persons to this ministry and priesthood—rather it is God himself—through his son Jesus Christ and by the power and action of his Holy Spirit that priests are made and ministries are empowered. To be sure, the church tests

every vocation and through time-honored procedures—subject to change—determines who will in fact be ordained. The church has not argued that the priesthood is our gift to the church but rather God's gift to us—whereby the secret of his will and his design for the ages is made known to and for his people.

I am aware and acknowledge that there are those in this diocese and throughout the Anglican Communion who are opposed to the inclusion of women in this church's ministry and priesthood. The

commitment which we share is not shared by all and as we proceed I pray we will do so not arrogantly as though we possess this priesthood or that we possess any absolute wisdom that makes our position righteous. This priesthood belongs to our Lord and humbly I believe with St. Paul that "through the gift of God's grace we are made servants of the Gospel" and empowered to proclaim the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ and to make all people see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. I believe further that in all ages God does appoint and call many whom we may see as "the least of all saints," to be ministers and priests in his church and through them he broadens and deepens the ministry of the church. The notions of exclusiveness were rejected by our Lord and by those who have passed on the Gospel message to us. Further, I am



*Bishop Walker delivers his sermon. Photo: Broffman*

convinced that though we are often tardy in understanding the secret, this does not mean that the secret must forever remain closed. The truth revealed in Christ is perceived by faith and the eyes of faith need continuously to be opened by his spirit in order that the perceptions of truth may become clearer and our lives and ministry more clearly reflect God's will for us and for the church.

The ministry in which all of us share and the priesthood to which some of us are called are given to us as a means through which we both receive and pass on the riches of the Christ. His love for those who suffer in the world; his concern for those who are enslaved politically and socially or in the depth of sin; his care for those who by the nature of their being are shut out, is ministered by every member of the body of Christ. And the special ministry of his priests and bishops does not set them above other members of the body but lays upon them a special necessity to make certain that all the needs of Christian life and community are established and guaranteed.

Lee, Joel, Carole, Rayford, John and Pauli you have been called to his ministry and priesthood. You have chosen to join the ranks of the ordained clergy but, and this is even more important, God has called you to be priests in his church. Everything you have done indicates the seriousness with which you have accepted that call. There are many ways that I could charge you as you enter and practice this priesthood. But let us state this as simply as possible.

1. Be diligent students of the Gospel so that the secret is constantly open to you.
2. Be faithful and disciplined teachers and preachers so that the gift of Christ is revealed and the secret is continuously made known to God's people.
3. Be constant in prayer so that the spirit may come to you and through you to the whole body.
4. Be humble bearers of the cross so that your celebration of his life in the Eucharist may ever be a vehicle for his love.

I have charged that you be humble bearers of the cross and I would add the word humble as a modifier of preacher, teacher, pastor, prophet or whatever other title by which you may be known. And keep in mind that humility does not imply self-flagellation nor a diminution of your worth that comes from God, but rather it

implies the absence of arrogance. It suggests a bold proclamation of who you are, i.e., ministers of Christ, and an acknowledgment that you are called not by the will of man, nor of human institutions, but by the Almighty Father through the church—the body of Christ. St. Paul proclaimed it of himself, before us. Let us not shrink

from the proclamation nor the implication for our lives. The world needs your ministry. It needs in these days the example of obedience to God which you have accepted. It requires your work to build a human community in which dignity and hope abound. Together let us get on with the work of our Lord. Praise the Lord. Amen.

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# A New Wine

*A Sermon preached at Washington Cathedral, January 16, 1977*

*by the Very Reverend Francis B. Sayre Jr.*

"This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee  
And manifested his glory,  
And his disciples believed in him." John 2:11

## I

So does John's Gospel begin the story of Christ's life. In Matthew, Mark and Luke the first tale is of his birth—the lovely Christmas saga we cherish so much.

But John opens his account with this marvelous little mystery of Jesus changing water into wine. The Fourth Gospel cares not so much for the historical record of the events, as for the meaning of that miraculous Incarnation. This is what Jesus was born to do in this world, John is saying!

To take the humble stables where each day is born, and transform them into holy mangers of God's light and love! To touch the moisture at the root of each human vine, and turn it into a sparkling wine, rare and doubly blessed. That's what Christ was sent to give—a new dimension to the common day—God's face would be molded there! The plain water of your life and mine distilled and purified, and made fit for a toast to the king! "We beheld the glory and it was full of grace and truth!"

I love to tell again that story of the wedding at Cana to couples who are married here because it reminds them that the life they propose to share can be naught but pedestrian, unless Christ come also to their bed and board to bless with God's peculiar gift the two ordinary mortals who merely by adding one life to the other could never of themselves achieve what God is so ready to bestow, when he is welcomed as the third in that sacred union. Water into wine! The miracle by which the plain of everyday is brushed by the rare and sparkling fire of eternity!

Whether it be the life of an individual,

or of a married family or of a vast nation such as ours, the water of earth is not enough! It nourishes the body only. But the spirit will die if there be no wine of love, of purpose and forgiveness and grace and proud commitment, and only God can make the one from the other!

## II

This week as Jimmy Carter takes the oath of office, we must be thinking of the life we share as a people upon this continent. What marriage shall we make anew with that destiny God has always had in store for us? What shall our prayer be for this rendez-vous of the sacred with the secular—the little round of life with the great ground of being?

For America the wine has pretty well run out. The feast has become insufferably dull, the spark is gone. I suggest this is why hosts of common folk were drawn to a simple almost unknown man from a rural crossroad as to the promise of a new beginning—the hope of an unspoiled integrity as yet not made captive by the massive self-righteousness and brutal possessiveness of American life. Here was fresh water that God might turn into wine, leaving behind the deadly pursuits of power or profit or prestige which led us all to war and chicanery—and to desperate poverty of the spirit.

So now comes Jimmy Carter to his Inauguration Day. And our prayer is that he may not falter in the courage of his openness; that God may take the plain water of his life and somehow transform it into the royal wine for which his countrymen