

February 28, 2021

Open Letter to Deacon Joe Millhouse

Dear Friends in Christ:

Anh chị em thân mến trong Chúa Kitô:

Estimados Amigos y Amigas en Cristo:

In this week's space, instead of the usual letter to the community, I would like to share an open letter to Deacon Joe Millhouse on the occasion of his ordination. As he serves at all of the weekend Masses (and preaches!) for the first time, please join me in congratulating him but also in sharing with him gratitude and prayers for his commitment of service to all of us.

Deacon Joe,

"May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment." Last weekend, on February 20, 2021, a day which will forever be sacred for you, Christ has truly brought his good work in you to fulfillment. You have spent years being evaluated psychologically, academically, and pastorally. You have spent more continuing to be formed by God as a theologian, a servant, a man of prayer, but most of all as a beloved son of God. You have spent countless moments in prayer seeking God's will even as the Church and your loved ones prayed for you for the same intention.

After six long years of discernment, preparation, and formation, you have prostrated yourself on the floor of the cathedral, symbolizing the laying down of your own life, your own will, your own agenda, plans, and goals. You have died to yourself and through the laying on of hands been raised as a deacon of the Church, bound by promises of obedience and prayer.

You have been entrusted with the "Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach." (*Rite of Ordination of Several Deacons*, 210) Your past as a peace officer has forged you with a commitment to the justice of man's law. Now your identity as a servant of Christ and his people will forge you with a commitment to the justice of God's law. Your work as an investigator has shaped your mind and instincts in discerning truths that are hidden. Now, your identity as the herald of the Gospel will lead you to discern the

divine mysteries and the Word of God so that you may proclaim them boldly to God's holy people.

This preaching of the Gospel will sometimes come at the pulpit but even more so in the manner of your life. You will be called upon to not only be a minister of and at the Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Matrimony, and the Eucharist, but to be a particular embodiment of Christ the Servant who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). In word and in action, you will exercise the *diakonia* of Christ by being an emissary – yes, of the bishop and of me as your pastor, but first and foremost an emissary of Christ who bears the good news of salvation.

Indeed, you have been charged with great responsibilities. And yet, as you already know intellectually and will come to know at a profound intimate level spiritually, the power is never truly yours but from Christ who never ceases to intercede for His people. "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

In His Incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection, Christ has revealed to us the true nature of love. Love the people of God as Christ has first loved you, and they will love and support you even in spite of your human weakness. Preach the truth that human hearts are hungry to hear, but always with love and mercy. Be a humble steward of the divine mysteries as you serve at the altar. As a man of the community and as a husband and father, be a model and an advocate for the families of our parish.

On behalf of the community of the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, know that I am extremely proud of you and grateful to you (and to Wendy who has accompanied you on this journey) for your "yes" to the Lord. I welcome you as a fellow laborer in the vineyard of the Lord as we continue to preach the Gospel and work for the salvation of souls. One journey has ended for you and a beautiful new one has begun. May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, we place all our trust in You. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Very Reverend Jeffrey L. Bame

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Rector & Parish Administrator

