

Love the Church, love the Pope, be faithful to the Church's teachings
Exodus 19,3-8. 16-20; 1Cor12, 3-7. 12-13; Jn 20, 19-23

Today, I am here, ordained a priest. Today is Pentecost, the day when we remember the descent of the Holy Spirit on Our Lady and the apostles. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. Today is also my birthday as a priest.

If it was not for the Church, I of course could not have become a priest. Thank you, Jesus, for founding the Church on the firm rock of Peter – Peter, the first Bishop of Rome...the first Pope. In a speech he made a few decades ago, Pope John Paul II said: "Love the Church, love the Pope, and be faithful to the church's teachings."

My life has been a journey – a journey of love, a journey of faith, and a journey made aboard the marvelous ship which is the Church. Missionaries brought the Faith to India from Europe in the late 1800's. They must have really loved the Church to come to a pagan world. And what a wonderful effect that had on my home town! Our whole region was converted, and just like RCIA candidates are received into the Church here in the United States, my grandparents became Catholic. The Faith was passed on from my grandparents to my parents who, I am happy to say, are here today. (It is their first trip to the U.S.A.) And then my father and mother passed the Faith on to me and to my brother and sisters and to their children. How can I not love the Church!

In the 19th chapter of Exodus, we read how God spoke to Moses: "You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice – keeping covenant -- you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation."

Truly, God bore our family on eagle's wings. He made us His special possession, leading us on to strive for holiness in our everyday lives.

My grandparents were deeply devoted to the Church and its servants. They had tremendous respect for priests and Sisters. My grandfather played the organ, and his children sang in the choir. My Dad's brother became a priest, and my Mom's sister and two nieces became Sisters. My maternal grandparents always wanted to have a priest in the family, and today their wish became true, when Bishop Leonard Blair ordained me just a few hours ago.

The Church has always been a part of our life. While still an infant, my Mom placed me on the altar at our home parish. In faith, she offered me to God for His service. I know my parents prayed for me, and I have also experienced the power of the prayers of my grandparents who departed from this life full of faith.

I witnessed the charity practiced at my grandparents' house – how they would feed the hungry and homeless. Even at a young age – 4 or 5 years old – I watched the good example of my grandparents, and imitated them. As I grew up, my parents took us, their five children, to Sunday Mass. Mom had five coins ready each Sunday for us children to practice charity by putting money in the offertory collection. My love for the Church continued to grow as I felt the attraction of the holiness of the Church.

As I grew older, the Church helped my spiritual life to blossom. I had opportunities to pray, to make holy hours before the Blessed Sacrament, to go to confession to a priest and receive God's pardon and hope and joy and peace, just like the words Jesus spoke to the 12 apostles: "peace be with you." At age 17, I started to go to daily Mass and received spiritual nourishment from Jesus' Body and Blood in the Eucharist. I was very shy in public (and still am), but the church helped me put my talents to use. I read at Mass, I helped as an altar server, I cleaned the Church, conducted the Rosary, sang in the choir, and visited hospitals and homes.

It became clear that God was calling me to give my life entirely and joyfully to His service in the Church. Even though I had a job and a growing salary, God's call to serve Him in the Church was more powerful than the appeal of money or possessions. And finally, God's call has led me to the United States, to the diocese of Toledo, and I am so happy to have the privilege to serve you here. Yes, America has its challenges, but I can tell you that it has been wonderful to come to a country where people are welcomed and appreciated, regardless of race, cultural background or nationality. For myself, I have been overwhelmed by the love, generosity and affection shown to me as I serve the Church here in the United States.

The Church is not a mere human institution. It was founded by Christ and is therefore holy. The Church dispenses God's grace through the seven sacraments. The Church is our mother – merciful, loving and very caring. All of us who are baptized are members of the Church...and we make up one body – the mystical Body of Christ. Christ is the Head, and we are His body. As St. Paul writes: "The body is one, and has many members, but all of the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ." And St. Paul goes on to emphasize that "it was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one Body." It is the Spirit, therefore, who unites us Christians as one body, the Holy Spirit -- who was poured out on the twelve apostles in the upper room almost 2000 years ago.

How consoling it is for me as a newly ordained priest to consider how the Holy Spirit strengthened these twelve men – these first priests of the Church who clearly were very weak and imperfect human instruments. But God's power is infinite, and once the Holy Spirit came upon them, these twelve simple men transformed the whole world with the message and grace of the Lord. These men could only bear fruit thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit, so today, I ask you from the bottom of my heart: please pray for me often that the Spirit of the Lord will always strengthen and guide me in my priesthood. I am also a weak instrument, but all things are possible with God!

Finally, I wish to thank all of you who have made such a difference in my journey to the priesthood. I have already mentioned my family, but I should again thank Bishop Blair, Fr. Michael Billian, Father Phil, our Pastor, all of the members of the clergy, all of the consecrated people, and all of the lay faithful. You truly made me part of your family, and I am so thankful for your love and kindness. You will all be in my prayers as I serve God as a priest.

And so, on this Feast of Pentecost, I would like to conclude with a few words from a very beautiful prayer: "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in all of us the fire of your divine love." Amen.

Fr. Kishore Kottana, Mass of Thanksgiving.
Pentecost Sunday
St. Mary, Sandusky, Ohio.