

## Comments on the occasion of ordination of Hector Coria Gonzalez Saturday, 1/8/11

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, said, “the ‘commandment’ of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.” *“El « mandamiento » del amor es posible sólo porque no es una mera exigencia: el amor puede ser « mandado » porque antes es dado.”*

In this instance, the Holy Father was speaking of Eucharist. These words are just as applicable to the priestly ministry you have assumed. Know that the Lord Jesus has chosen you. He has shown you a preferential love. Your life, your words and ways must make that love of Christ known to others.

Hector, together with your brother priests and your bishop, you are charged with the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Preaching and teaching is a fundamental, primary part of our mission as priests. More than just convey information or making persuasive arguments, there can be – should be -- a creative dimension to proclamation so that as is sung in psalm 33, “He spoke; and it came to be. He commanded; it sprang into being.”

This is obviously nothing that we do ourselves but if we hear his voice, if our hearts are silently attentive to his word, then his word can echo in our own. Our voice will resonate with God’s design. The same creative grace that brought the world into being can stir new life among our congregations. Jesus once turned to ask of the disciples of John, “What are you looking for?” With that same inquisitive spirit we can inspire young people and children to begin an amazing journey of faith. How many people are waiting for the words, “Go, your sins are forgiven you.” “Get up and walk.” “Get up and serve.”

Nurture a reverence for the Word we are given to speak. We are the stewards and servants of that saving Word. As we speak the word both in proclamation and preaching, we cannot be indifferent to its power in us and its power for others. There is a unique character to the ministry of the word in the sacramental rituals but we would demean the sacred word and deny the holy voice were we to fail to see how our speech, our conversation, our counsel and direction can serve as a reed through which God’s voice creates, revives, converts, renews, conforms, and refreshes.

Have a reverence for the Word that has been entrusted to us. Also, you must nurture a love and reverence for those who hear the word we speak. In this regard, there are those three insightful examples in the gospel. I spoke about the one from the account of John, where Jesus first asked the young disciples of John, “What are you looking for?” To their request to know where he lived, Jesus responded, “Come and see.” (Jn. 1.35-39) A whole new spiritual adventure ensues. In Mark, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the coming trials in Jerusalem. He turns to them and asked, "What were you arguing about on the way?" (Mk. 9.33) He then reveals the service of the cross as a response to the debate over power and seniority. In Luke, Jesus asked the disciples on the road to

Emmaus , "What are you discussing as you walk along?" (Lk. 24.17) The conversation that ensues causes the hearts of the disciples to burn with joy.

In all three instances, the attentive reverence of Jesus for his disciples prepared them to hear and see what the Lord would reveal to them. The context for all three revelations was the dialogue that Jesus initiated with his disciples. Our teaching, our leadership, and counsel, has to share this same dialogic quality. People will hopefully recognize you as a shepherd who listens well and who seek understanding. Foster in yourself a pastoral leadership that reflects both firm convictions and careful consultation.

Reverence for the word, reverence for those with whom we speak – both of these are at the reverent, obedient service of the one who choose us and appointed us to go out and bear much fruit (Jn. 15.16). He has called us to share in his word and drink of his spirit. As Paul tells the Galatians, "God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal. 4.6) Constitutive of this, is not only the Father's love for us but also our obedient love of the Father, as was the Son, the Word incarnate, obedient to the Father's will.

Obedience still rubs the American soul the wrong way. We like Paul's words about the freedom of the spirit but are reluctant to plumb the depth of Paul's understanding of the freedom that the Spirit gives. There we will understand love's design, "the plans of his heart from age to age." (Ps. 33) There deep calls unto deep (Ps. 42) and in willing obedience we cling to him in love because "his word is faithful and all his works to be trusted."

*"El amor puede ser « mandado » porque antes es dado."* "Love can be "commanded" because it has first been given."