

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio J.C.D.
Episcopal Ordination of F. Richard Spencer
(Nativity of the Virgin Micah and 2Tim 1:6-14)



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The genealogy according to St. Matthew insists on both divine Providence and the human response in the realization of the plan of God for humanity. The long list of names might seem tedious, but a closer look reminds us that Almighty God does not calculate according to human logic. The four women mentioned are all foreigners and many of the other figures are not exemplary. Yet they played a role in the history of our salvation. Together they invite us to reflect on how Almighty God prepares and forms us for service to Him and cares for the community of faith. Read in the context of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in whose magnificent Basilica we are gathered, we cannot fail to remember her role and exemplary discipleship.

Mary and Joseph were prepared for their role in the mystery of our salvation in simple ordinary ways. They learned the lessons of their faith and it conditioned their lives. They were obviously open to the Spirit and docile to will of God. They were confident in His fidelity. They were ready to mature in their faith. They grew to understand that their gifts, training and growth opened the horizons to a role much larger than they expected as residents in the unimportant Galilean town of Nazareth. They introduce us into the search of the deepest sense beyond the banalities of an existence lived in the perspective of faith in God and confidence in His will.

They show us how to learn the same lessons in our lives, so often imagined in one way and then experienced in a completely different manner. From the concerns of the spiritual care of the US Army in Europe and a move to studies at a prestigious school, Bishop-elect Spencer finds himself about to be ordained a successor of the Apostles with a participation in the pastoral cares of this global Archdiocese. Yet the Lord has prepared you day after day, year after year, to respond to His will with a simple and gentle acceptance of His invitation.

Is the role too great? Are the responsibilities heavy? Certainly, if we depend on ourselves! Yet Paul tells you to stir into flame the gift of God, which is of power, love, and self-control. He assures you that your fiat, like that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will always be supported by divine grace.

Is it not wonderful how Almighty God cares for the community of faith? “The Apostles chose helpers for themselves. Through the laying on of hands...they handed on to them the gift of the Holy Spirit which they received from Christ.”¹ Today the Bishops here present will invoke the Holy Spirit and impose their hands on you to pass on what we, unworthy though we are, have received. That transmission of divine gifts will open the door for you to share what you have received and be an instrument for the pastoral care of the people of God. You have listened and you will be able to serve.

Your service will take the form of teaching, governing, and sanctifying a portion of this particular Church over which the sun never sets. In a few moments I will place the Book of the Gospels over your head. It is an eloquent symbol. 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. To quote Archbishop Wuerl: “the embrace in the love of Jesus and the joy of His Gospel of new life are meant to be savored, cherished and shared”.²

Pope Benedict XVI defined the ministry of a bishop in terms of the original Greek "*episcopos*" that contains the verb "to see". [It] “means watching over, from above seeing from the lofty position of God. Seeing from God's perspective is seeing with love that wants to serve the other, wants to help him to become truly himself. Christ is the ‘Bishop of souls’, ..This means: he sees us from the perspective of God. In seeing from God's viewpoint, one has an overall vision, one sees the dangers as well as the hopes and possibilities. From God's perspective one sees the essential, one sees the inner man. If Christ is the Bishop of souls, the objective is to prevent the human soul from becoming impoverished and to ensure that the human being does not lose his essence, the capacity for truth and love; ...It means starting from Christ in order to be available to human beings so that they find life.”³

We also use other symbols to define your reception of the fullness of the priesthood. You come from a world where symbols are very significant. Everyone in that world knows their meaning. Allow me to single out the ring among the symbols of Episcopal Office.

¹ Right of Ordination of a Bishop, exhortation.

² Donald Wuerl, “Disciples of the Lord: Sharing the Vision”, p. 16.

³ Benedict XVI, homily for Sts. Peter and Paul, 29.VI.09.

It tells us that you are now intimately related to a particular Church. The title may be Auziensis, but in reality it is the Archdiocese for the Military Services where you will extend my ministry to our faithful in Europe and Asia. It signifies your incardination into a new archdiocese, while still retaining all of the richness and ties that you have nurtured with the First See of this land, Baltimore. It means that in addition to the faithful of the Army, you now become a spiritual father to the men, women, and families of the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, as well as faithful Veterans, students at the Service Academies, the co-sponsored seminarians, and any Catholic employed by the Federal Government outside our borders. You lose nothing of the wealth of your experience as a green-suiter and yet embrace those of the other services and situations.

We have no Army, Navy, or Air Force Auxiliaries. We only have successors of the Apostles who strive to be all things to all people for a Nation deeply suffering the anxieties of war. When I relayed the Holy Father's will to you and you accepted, I rejoiced not only because I need more help, but also because of who you are and what you will bring to all of us. There is no doubt that you will continue the spirit of service that has characterized this Archdiocese in its first quarter century of ministry. In the words of St. John Chrysostom: "God certainly does not need vessels of gold, but, indeed desires souls similar to gold".⁴

It is providential that we gather in Mary's House on the Feast of her birth, one of the oldest Marian Feasts on the liturgical calendar, already present in the east in the VI Century, because her significant role in the history of salvation. That role is defined by her willingness to accept her vocation as the Mother of the Savior, the Prince of Peace. In addition to the privilege of being free from any taint of original sin, she, too, drew on what she had learned from Ann and Joachim to open her heart to the divine will.

She shows us, as the first Christian, the original bearer of Christ, what it means to live according to the Gospel. She intercedes for us as we beg divine assistance for your ministry and as we pray for lasting peace. We recognize that peace as the first gift and ardent desire of the Risen Lord. It is certainly the first prayer of those we serve, the men, women, and families lacerated by the effects of war. It must also be the hope of this Nation, founded on inalienable principles, and eager to share her gifts with other Nations, as well.

"...the peoples of the earth, too, are called to build relationships of solidarity and cooperation among themselves, as befits members of the one *human family*. "All peoples"—as the Second Vatican Council declared—"are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the face of the earth (cf. *Acts 17:26*); they also have one final end, God".⁵

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homily 50, 3-4; PG 58, 508-9

⁵ Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2008, 1.

Therefore, Rick my brother, you are to take your place in the genealogy of the history of the Church as a Shepherd to help guide the Archdiocese for the Military Services as she begins the next quarter century of her history. You bring the gentleness of an authentic Shepherd and the warmth of the south where you were born. As we invoke the saints, take courage and trust in their intercession. Like Mary, our Mother, they stand before the Throne of Grace to offer you their example and prayers. Listen to them and you will serve well!