

First Mass of Fr. Augustine Hoelke  
St. Maria Goretti, Arlington  
August 21, 2010  
Fr. Bernard Marton

Most Reverend Bishop Van, Very Reverend Fr. Abbot Denis, Dear Fr. Augustine and fellow priests and brother monks, dear Hoelke family,  
My dear friends in Christ,

Not too long ago, a wise old priest-friend gave me some very good advice about homilies. He said that you have to pay careful attention to three points: make sure that one, the introduction, two, the conclusion, are interesting attention getters, and, three, the most important point to keep in mind is, you make the transition between the two previous points as short as possible.

Now I don't know if this introduction fulfills the requirement for the first point; I am sure that I can handle the second without much difficulty—I usually find that my homilies tend to run too long when I have very little to say—this time I have given much thought as to what I can share with you, thus more than likely I will not bore you with too long a sermon, so point two will also be well taken care of. For the third point, the jury is out and you will be the judge.

When Fr. Augustine, at that time he was still Br. Augustine under my care as Master of Junior Monks in the monastery, approached me in the spring that I should be the homilist at his First Mass, I was both delighted and distressed. Delighted that after years under my care, he still thought enough of me to request that I preach at this wonderful occasion, and at the same time distressed at the thought that I will really be put on the spot to come up with some memorable, possibly even quotable statements that will stick with him, and with you, for at least some time. I immediately thought of my own ordination and first mass—and of my homilist. I do remember one thing: that I recall absolutely nothing about what he said. This is probably worse than the comments I often hear from our graduates about our yearly Commencement speaker: you are supposed to hang on every word your homilist has to say, all the wisdom he will impart to you since he is about to map out the rest of your priestly life for you. At least I have some excuses, all subjective, not relating to the homilist's eloquence or depth of his thoughts: for one, it happened 43 years ago, secondly, it was delivered by Cistercian father, Josef Hermans, of Stams, Austria—in German! He was also the homilist at my brother's first mass in the same church some 18 years prior, since he, Fr. Henry, was also ordained, as I was, in the Jesuit Church of Innsbruck, Austria, by the same bishop. I was also thinking about drawing some parallels between Fr. Augustine and myself, but I came up with precious little: yet that little is exactly what I would like to emphasize, for it serves as the cornerstone of today's Gospel: "the greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." This is the same thought that comes back time after time in the New

Testament, sometimes paraphrased into the statement that “the first shall be last and the last shall be first.”

All levity aside I, ask you to retain only this last thought that is really the Gospel truth, and remember it not because it was preached at a First Mass, but because it was proclaimed as the Word of God found in Saint Matthew’s Gospel. And I ask you to consider it in its proper context, for then you will see it becoming meaningful not only for a newly ordained priest but for every member of the body of Christ.

To continue the similarities with my own experience, the last, or least, the Benjamin of the family (and I can be quite literal at this point; Fr. Augustine’s family and friends know him as Ben, as we all did in the prep school—and I was also the youngest among my siblings) yesterday he became exalted: he became an *alter Christus*, an awesome statement—another Christ, thus the servant of all. For what can be more noble than to allow Jesus to serve his brethren in the person of the priest, to make present the sacrifice of the cross daily in the Mass, and to effect the Body of Christ on this earth through the miracle of the Eucharist. The priestly ordination marks him with an indelible sign of a sacrament that empowers him to pronounce the words “this is my body” and “this is my blood.” With the transformation of the species to the body and blood of the Redeemer, his own person is also transformed: from the lofty stature of an ordained minister of Christ, he is to assume the Suffering Servant that the Lamb of God was destined to become. He will be wounded, not just “*caritate vulneratus*” of yesterday’s beautiful Alleluia verse, *wounded by love*, but wounded in many other ways, as we were told by Fr. Mark, our Retreat Master just last week at our community retreat, and show up at the seat of the Heavenly Father, wearing wounds, just like our Master, and that will be our entry ticket: we want to be marked the same way as our Redeemer was. He will be wounded by trials of body and soul, of the mind and the spirit in many ways he now cannot even fully fathom. But he will be following gladly in the footsteps of Jesus as he will try more and more to become a better “prayer”—pray-er, i.e. he who prays, a man of God.

But he was also empowered to pronounce some other words of a sentence just as important, a sentence that will soothe and heal: he will, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, say to the penitent in the name and in the person of Jesus himself, “and I absolve you from your sins.” What two sentences are more powerful and fulfilling to the humble servant than the ones effecting transubstantiation and absolution? No profession, lofty as it might be, no position in the business world or academia can compare with this power that was imparted to him yesterday at his ordination. For nothing is more important than the salvation of souls, and he will now be eminently qualified to serve and to minister, to soothe and to heal the wounded soul. He will be the physician of souls who can prescribe a medicine more than magical that unfailingly will effect salvation. As a deacon he has already preached the word of God, not in his own name, but in the name of Jesus. And from now on he will be giving spiritual direction and advice not out of

the fountainhead of his own wisdom, but out of and through the inspiration that the Holy Spirit unfailingly imparts to him.

Fr. Augustine has gone through a number of lasts and firsts: the last in his family to go through Cistercian, first former at the bottom of the totem pole in the Middle School to a senior eighth former in the Upper School. Novice in the monastery to Senior professed monk among his brethren. From seasoned veteran of monastic observance (after all his five years of formation do count for something) to an absolute rookie Form Master of his incoming class of 2018, Fr. Augustine himself will undergo some profound changes in the crucible of both monastic and academic daily routine. And while at times he will have to remind his charges of the Gospel advice of Jesus when he referred to the Pharisees: “do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example” in other words “do as I say but not do as I do,” he will grow in virtue and observance to achieve the status of his old mentors, or at least some of his old mentors, and teachers, whereby he will become for them a worthy example whose actions can also be followed and held up as model.

Fr. Augustine, you have our support in prayers and helpful readiness. You, one of our Benjamin priests, rookie form master, can count on us as you set out on your journey of service. We will be with you all along and help you when you need assistance. We will pray for you and your family that the sacrifice you and they have made will result in abundant blessings for our communities.

When I periodically visit the old monastery of my first mass in Stams in Austria, I always go to the cemetery and stop by the burial site of my old friends—more and more have taken up residence at that location—I always check out that cherished spot directly behind the apsis of the church in the monastic cemetery where my Primizprädiger, Fr. Josef Hermans awaits the resurrection. I say a short prayer at the tomb of Abbot Eugene, my dear friend and a number of his monks alongside him. I now ask you that when my time comes, you would do the same for me. In the meantime I am counting on you to deliver the homily in about seven years at my own golden jubilee.

Sincere congratulations, Fr. Augustine, may God’s abundant blessings descend upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.