

**First Mass of Father Ignatius
Our Lady of Dallas Abbey
March 27, 2011
Fr. Roch Kereszty**

Dear Father Ignatius, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“I tell you, look up and see that the fields are ripe for the harvest,” said Jesus in today’s Gospel. This was true at the time when Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman but true also today as the Lord points out the work to his newly ordained priest, Fr. Ignatius Peacher. From all eternity God has foreseen and predestined you, Fr. Ignatius, to become his servant. He chose your parents and arranged the circumstances of your life so that at one point in your life the priestly vocation began to appeal to you. It took several years, and perhaps some vain efforts on your part to resist it, but eventually you obeyed the call; and your priestly and monastic vocation became increasingly the source of your peace and the compass for the journey of your life. And now you know that the happiness of your life, in fact, your eternal life depends on how you carry out the mission the Lord has entrusted to you.

Your task will be *to preach* the word of God, *to shape and form* a community of faith out of those entrusted to you, and *to sanctify* them, that is, to help them become a self-offering to God. Let me say a few words about each of these three aspects of your priestly mission.

You will preach not only the words of God from a passage in the Bible, but *the* Word of God, Jesus Christ and him crucified. People are not so much looking for a refined and subtle intellectual argument, rather they want to know: Is Jesus Christ for real? Is he more than a pious memory, an abstract idea, the slogan of an ideology? And you will be able to repeat to these seekers the words of John the Apostle: “What we have seen and heard what our hands have touched, this we proclaim to you, Jesus Christ, the word of life and Life Itself.” You will show them that Christ is for real by your preaching, but even more so by your life.

You will also administer the sacraments and, most especially, you will celebrate the Holy Eucharist for and with your students and the people.

You know that the Christian preaching and sacramental ministry are not only the transmission of a teaching, the communication of a list of truths and a faithful carrying out of the sacramental ritual. All these of course, must be done and done well. But ultimately with St. Paul and St. Bernard and with many other great priests, *you are to become a father and mother* of those entrusted to your care. You will beget

your children by the word of God and will give them a new birth in the sacrament of baptism and revive them in the sacrament of reconciliation and nourish them with the bread of life. You will be like St. Paul who said he was in birth pangs until Christ is being shaped and formed in his faithful. Your joy will be great when you see how the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding them, when you see their sincere efforts to do God's will, to be humble and loving, when you discover in them at least some resemblance to Christ himself.

At other times *you will share their sorrows and tears*, and when they fall away from the Way that is Christ, your prayers and concerns will accompany them. You will love the lost sheep with the patience and love of the Good Shepherd and you will go after them and will try to carry them back to the flock of Christ. You will not give up hope and prayer for them even if they die without outward signs of repentance.

It is not enough for you to be a shepherd. *You are called Father* and that is what you are, making present the fatherhood of Jesus Christ. Reflect on the life of St. Joseph. Providentially your name in baptism is Juan Jose, both John and Joseph. As St. Joseph did not biologically beget Jesus, but loved him even more than if he had been his natural son, so will you love your students. You are asked to love them with the very love of Jesus Christ. As Paul said: "I long for you all with the very guts, with the very heart of Jesus Christ." This love is strong, firm and tough and yet tender and affectionate so that your student will remember it for the rest of his life. Pray then that you may become what you are called from now on, "father."

Before you entered the monastery and even later, you have been in many places of Europe, admired, loved and assimilated many of its cultural treasures. In this country there are few priests who have been given the opportunity to experience this rich cultural heritage. At the same time an educated laity has grown up who would like to see how they can harmonize their love for artistic and literary beauty, their love for all the values of the world with their faith in God, in Christ and in the Church which teaches that the figure of this world as it is now will fade away. To the extent that you possess these polarities in your life you can help your people also to find the right balance and harmony of loving the beauty of the world and of culture because they lead us to the infinite beauty of the Son of God. You will not be a snob who proudly struts around and shows off his alleged cultural superiority, but you will communicate your love of culture and your love of Jesus Christ with simplicity and common sense.

Finally, while in the midst of your work, you will realize that the most important aspect of the priest's life is not his manifold activity but *his life of prayer*. Listen to Paul's statement in the letter to the Philippians: "I give thanks to my God in every remembrance of you praying always with joy in my every

prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the Gospel from the first day until now.” Mark the typically Pauline formulation: words “all” and “every” and “always.” In every prayer and thanksgiving and always Paul appears before God burdened by *his solitudine* for all the churches. We should also come before God with the issues of our students and our people and ask God with trust and perseverance. With the trust of a son and with the perseverance of the widow who kept bothering the unjust judge as long as he would not do her justice.

Let me finish with a story from Bruce Marshall (not the theologian at SMU, but a British novelist) in his novel, *To Every Man a Penny*. This is the story of a somewhat naïve but decent priest. All his life this priest was wondering about a parable of Jesus, “The Workers of the Vineyard.” He can’t comprehend why everyone gets a penny (at that time a full day’s wages) at the end of the day regardless of how much he has worked: all day, half day or just an hour. But at the end of his life he finally understands. God is not doing any injustice. Working in the vineyard of the Lord was itself its own reward. As an old priest who is already almost blind he says the same mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin every day, but he is deeply happy and grateful. This kind of happiness do I wish to you Fr. Ignatius—without, of course, going blind. I wish you the happiness of spending your entire life in the Lord’s vineyard carrying the burden of the scorching Texas heat and rejoicing in it.

Amen.

Intercessions:

1. In thanksgiving for all that Fr. Ignatius’s parents did in fostering and supporting his vocation, let us pray to the Lord...
2. For all those who helped on his way to the priesthood, let us pray to the Lord...
3. That young men and women may have the courage and faith to embrace the religious and priestly vocation, let us pray to the Lord...
4. For all those who passed away from this life, especially the relatives of Fr. Ignatius, that they may come to see the face of God, let us pray to the Lord...
5. For those who defend freedom all over the world that God may protect and assure the safe return to their homes, let us pray to the Lord...
6. For our personal intentions let us pray in silence...let us pray to the Lord