



**Rev. Dr. Sally L. Harbold,
Homily at the Ordination of
Jennifer Ronan Durant,
Saturday, Apr 14, 2012**



Thank you to David and to the people of Church of Our Savior for preparing this wonderful celebration for us. Thank you to Bishop Curry for coming here to close the circle and inaugurate this new beginning for Jennifer on this day....

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Thank you to David and to the people of Church of Our Savior for preparing this wonderful celebration for us. Thank you to Bishop Curry for coming here to close the circle and inaugurate this new beginning for Jennifer on this day. Thank you to the people of St. Paul's Episcopal Church who have come here from Cary, which we like to call "Jennifer's home". Thank you to Matt and Chris and Kate for standing with Jennifer through this amazing journey.

It has been a wonderful gift from God that Jennifer and I have become such good friends, especially when we are so very different. (not just in our hair styles) Thank you for your friendship to me... And for inviting me to preach this day.

In the context of our lessons, which Jennifer has chosen, I would like to invite us to reflect upon this question: "how in heaven's name is Jennifer going to do this ministry called "the priesthood?"

Or perhaps stated more appropriately, What will sustain you Jennifer? And for all of us, what sustains us as we continue to walk the journey of faith?

The Old Testament lesson tells us that God spoke these words to Moses ..."I will take some of the spirit that is on you [Moses] and put it on them [the elders]; and they shall bear the burden of the people...so that you will not bear it all by yourself". *What a wise man Moses was to ask for help!* Well, apparently it took some prodding from his father in law, but Moses responded to that prodding.

Everything that we do today is about this Spirit of God that Bishop Curry will call down upon you, setting you apart for the ministry of priest in the church. The Spirit that Moses knew and that he wished and wished could be shared with others is coming your way in a new way, and for a new role on this day. As we lay hands upon you we are reminded that you are linked, all the way back to Jesus in the apostolic succession, and even back to Moses, linked to all leaders in the church who have responded to the call to what we in the church call ordained ministry.

We are here this morning because your call has been confirmed. We are here because, though you said yes to God many, many years ago, the church has now given it's great Amen back to your 'yes' to God.

And in this passage in Numbers, where we know that Moses appealed and God answered to "share the Spirit of God" we hear an important reminder: "yes", says God, I will share this spirit with the others, why? "*So that you will not bear it all by yourself*".

The abundance of the Spirit given is balanced by the reminder that we cannot do this alone. In fact we must not bear these burdens by ourselves. Not one of us can be all things to all people.

Of course in our humanity we often want to do things on our own.

I certainly have not strayed far enough away from the thought that my way is the best way, hard as I try. And now that I have confessed this I hope I am not the only one here who likes to have things their own way. This lesson invites us to share the burden and the joys of priestly leadership and of the journey of faith which we walk each day with each other.

The passage from this part of Moses story reminds all of us that God has taken some of the spirit and placed it upon, as we now know, **all people**, so that none of us must bear the burden all by ourselves. [Or insist on taking charge of everything all by our selves.] Our life is meant to be inter-dependent.

Jennifer, you will be a priest among other priests, a leader among many who are also leaders, but first and above all, you are a child of God among all the children of God.

You and I and each one of us here will be sustained in this journey as we are able to live it **with** one another; as we are able to recognize God's Spirit in the midst of all of humanity; and, most importantly, as we are able to share our burdens with one another.

The letter to the Ephesians enumerates some of the gifts of this 'spirit' that Moses asked God to share with others. And the only mistake we can make today is to assume that these gifts are just given to those who are ordained. It will be a part of your work Jennifer, to JOIN with the people of God here at Church of Our Savior, and to join with David and all of your other colleagues in leadership: to, as the passage says, hold one another accountable; to "no longer be (as) children"; to "speak... the truth in love"; and to "grow up in every way into [he] who is the head, into Christ. This is our on-going charge. Not behaving as children but growing up, speaking the truth in love, holding one another accountable.

This is in part the call for all of us as followers of Jesus. These are some *instructions*, if you will, on how to live into the mystery of being "knit together", of being "the body of Christ", and "promot[ing] the body's growth.

So how do we do this mysterious work *together* of *being* 'the body of Christ', as lay and as ordained persons? There are two responses to this question within the passage from Ephesians.

First and foremost "each of us was given grace" not some of us, EACH OF US! Everyone here, every human being is called into being by God's grace and lives each day by God's grace.

Grace is so subtle and so powerful... Tumbling around in our world in the most surprising ways and places, sometimes difficult to find, always amazing in it's manifestation. Never far away. But perhaps limited by our ability to embrace it, to seek it, to lavish in it as God's ever present gift to us. We do the work first and foremost of being knit together and promoting the growth of the body of Christ by encountering and engaging with God's grace freely given us.

And secondly, we can do this mysterious work together, ordained and lay, of being the body of Christ as we are invited to by Jesus *because* we ALL have been given particular gifts. The passage lists: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.... But don't think that this is an exclusive list my friends. There are many gifts of the Spirit which we have no time to enumerate here. However there is something I want to notice about the list in Ephesians...why these particular gifts might be listed here.

Notice with me, if you will, that "apostles, prophets, evangelists..., pastors and teachers are all gifts of **transmission** rather than specific gifts of skill toward production. Those who preach and teach, those who prophesy and evangelize and most importantly, listed first, those who have decided to follow Jesus all are transmitting their connection with the holy unto others. One gift of ordained leadership, which also is manifest in lay leadership, is the opportunity to stay *connected with God ourselves and be able then to share that connection with others*: so that all might be built up, exhorted, filled with love and grace, and have moments of truly knowing that God IS, and is with us.

God's love is unstop-able, immeasurable, insurmountable, and most decidedly beyond our human understanding.

May it be so in all of our lives, may we have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to receive, through grace, these gifts of transmission from God. May we have the ability to transmit that grace to one another...grace that sustains us... grace that enables us to recognize and use our God given gifts.

Finally, in our gospel lesson, we are reminded of the most concrete or tactile way that Christians might have to be sustained by God: the "bread of life". Jesus promises: "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry". And "whoever believes in me will never be thirsty".

Never. I do not believe that Jesus uses this word lightly. The promise continues with these words "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away...." There it is again. I will never drive away anyone who comes to me; you will never be left hungry; you will never be left thirsty.

Our first and best opportunity as priests and people is to be here, at this table, as often as we are able, gathered to be fed by the living God. To be fed in ways we cannot understand, to embrace the mystery of God's life given for us, to take into our bodies the gifts of bread and wine and to expect these mysterious gifts to sustain us, to expect them to feed us with the mystery of God present to us in this moment and forever. Will

it make everything better or alright for us? No, of course it will not. But it will sustain us. This feeding sustains us.

Jennifer, will you stand please.

Dear friend, You will be sustained in your ministry as you are able to know and to recognize God's Spirit in the midst of all of humanity....

You will be sustained as you are able to share the burden of ministry with others. Remember that you are not called to do this alone.

Jennifer you will be sustained in ministry because grace will sustain you. Grace will enable you to recognize and use your gifts.

Grace will enable you to recognize and call forth the gifts of others.

Jennifer, stay hungry. So that you might be fed. Stay thirsty for God, so that you might always believe. Keep your longing for Jesus alive and you will always be growing into the fullness of the stature of Christ. This will not make everything alright. But it definitely will sustain you. For God will never leave you or drive you away.

I love you. And I think some other people do also.

Will all of you join me by responding to the great acclamation of Easter?

Allelulia, Christ is Risen. *The Lord is Risen Indeed, Allelulia.*

Amen, Amen.

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