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Bishop ListECKi ordains five new priests for the diocese

By Franz Klein
Staff Writer

LA CROSSE – Bishop Jerome E. ListECKi termed it a much-needed “bumper crop.” On June 27, he ordained five men to the priesthood during a two-and-a-half hour liturgy at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman. This year’s group is the diocese’s largest in a decade – and will get even larger in November, when a sixth man is scheduled to be ordained.

The five men ordained on June 27 include the diocese’s new youngest priest, 27-year-old Father Jesse Burish, a native son of St. Matthew’s, Wausau, as well as Father David Rybicki, 62 years old and formerly a Spanish teacher at Columbus High School in Marshfield.

The bishop also ordained Fathers Victor Feltes, 28, of St. Raymond de Peñafort, Fall Creek; Greg Bohren, 32, of Roncalli Newman Parish, La Crosse; and Greg Michaud, 44, of St. Mary’s, Neillsville.

In November the bishop is scheduled to ordain newly appointed Pacelli High School (Stevens Point) chaplain Deacon Robert Letona in a separate ceremony.

On June 27 the ordinandi sat in the pews with their relatives during the Scripture readings. They were dressed in white albs and also wore a deacon’s stole. Following the Gospel, they were called forward by name. Responding “Present,” each man walked into the sanctuary, where Bishop ListECKi was seated before the altar, and bowed to him.

“Have they been found worthy?” Bishop ListECKi asked of Father Joseph Hirsch, director of vocations for the diocese, who responded in the affirmative. “We choose these men, our brothers, for the order of the priesthood,” the bishop then said, to thunderous applause from the congregation.

Priests are his heroes, Bishop ListECKi said in his homily as the five ordinandi sat on stools before him. “In today’s world, this might seem strange,” the bishop said. “Heroes have swashbuckling good looks, extreme intelligence, and the ability to access danger and plunge headlong into the teeth of the foe without hesitation.”

“I’m sure that you have this concept of yourselves,” the bishop told the five men, to chuckles from the congregation.

“Priests come in all shapes, colors and sizes,” he continued. “They vary in age from as young as 25 or 26 to senior priests who are 60, 70, 80, 90, and even in their 100s. Their personalities vary from extroverts to introverts. Some are multitalented, some are not. So I ask myself, what aspect is it that makes priests my heroes?”

“It is in the nature of the hero to exhibit extraordinary service to mankind,” Bishop ListECKI said. “Oftentimes this means the risk of his very life, and thereby acting as a model to others in living what is most noble for us. And the priest, by his very nature, is one who offers and identifies with sacrifice.”

Today’s world is “deeply troubled,” the bishop said. “We place our confidence in the riches of the material world only to find that it is vain. We have sought to insulate ourselves from the crying needs of our brothers and sisters only to discover loneliness. We have sought personal, sensual pleasure only to find it unfulfilled. My brothers, the world is in dire need of the priest!”

Confronted by the world’s need, Bishop ListECKI called the five ordinandi “a sign of the presence of the Lord,” and “a sign that points to the ultimate answer: Jesus, our Lord and Savior.” He advised them not to work alone, but “in solidarity with the presbyterate here in the Diocese of La Crosse and in the world, whose wisdom and fortitude have been tried and tested.”

Bishop ListECKI counseled them to be “holy priests and to abide in Christ,” and to “proclaim the dignity of all human life from the moment of conception to natural death, to feed the poor and neglected in our society, to support Christian families, to be ambassadors of peace and understanding, to assist the faithful to pray, and to welcome the sinner home to the embrace of God’s mercy.”

“You are here in this moment because God has been gracious to you,” the bishop said in thanking their families and relatives. “As a priest, you will be able to thank them in a special way by including them in your holy sacrifice of the Mass.”

“In a moment, hands will be placed upon you and a change will occur,” he continued. “To the world nothing will appear to happen, but internally you will be marked as belonging to Christ and you will be called to lay down your life for His Church.”

“As your bishop, I am proud that your priesthood will be exercised here in the Diocese of La Crosse, and that you will be expanding the ranks of my priestly heroes,” he said.

The ordinandi lay prostrate in the sanctuary during the litany of saints, while Bishop Listecki, the priests and deacons of the diocese and the congregation knelt and prayed. Rising, the men came forward and knelt before the bishop one by one, and he laid hands on them in silence, ordaining them priests. The priests in attendance followed suit, entering the sanctuary and laying hands on the five men.

Newly ordained Father Burish was vested in a priest’s stole and chasuble by Father Bob Thorn, pastor of St. Matthew’s in Wausau; Father Rybicki by Fathers Brian Konopa, pastor of St. Olaf in Eau Claire, and Douglas Robertson, pastor of Mary Mother of the Church, La Crosse; Father Michaud by Monsignor Richard Gilles, diocesan vicar general, and Father Jim Weighner, administrator of St. Gabriel’s and St. John’s, Prairie du Chien, and Sacred Heart, Wauzeka; Father Feltes by Fathers John Hogan, pastor of St. Raymond, Fall Creek, and Paul Gitter, on the staff of St. John Vianney Seminary in St. Paul and formerly pastor of St. Raymond; and Father Bohren by Fathers Mark Pierce, pastor of Roncalli Newman in La Crosse, and Pat Umberger, pastor of St. Patrick’s in Onalaska.

Bishop Listecki anointed the new priests’ hands with sacred chrism, and presented them with a chalice and paten containing bread and wine, telling them to imitate the mystery they celebrate. He then embraced them, and the priests in attendance did the same.

Their hands anointed, and vested in the garb of a priest, the diocese’s five new priests shared the Eucharistic prayer with their bishop, saying with him the words that change ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Following Mass, the new priests received their first assignments: Father Bohren will be associate pastor at St. Patrick’s, Onalaska; Father Feltes will be associate at St. John the Baptist, Marshfield, and Christ the King, Spencer, and chaplain at Columbus High School, Marshfield; Father Michaud will be associate at Resurrection Parish and chaplain at Newman High School, Wausau; Father Rybicki will be associate at St. Mary’s, Durand, Holy Rosary, Lima, and Sacred Heart, Mondovi; Father Burish will be in residence at Blessed Sacrament, La Crosse, until he returns to Rome in the fall to finish his license in fundamental theology at the Gregorian University.

CT/Stan Gould

Priests from the Diocese of La Crosse and elsewhere lay hands on the five men newly ordained to the priesthood on June 27 by Bishop ListECKI at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman in La Crosse.

CT/Franz Klein

Bishop ListECKI hands newly ordained Father David Rybicki a chalice and paten containing bread and wine, telling him, “Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: Model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross.”

CT/Stan Gould

In silence, Bishop ListECKI lays hands on Deacon Greg Michaud, conferring the Holy Spirit and ordaining him to the order of the priesthood.

CT/Franz Klein

Father Mark Pierce, pastor of La Crosse’s Roncalli Newman Center, places a priest’s stole over newly ordained Father Greg Bohren’s shoulders. Father Bohren attended the Newman Center while he was a student at UW-La Crosse. Assisting Father Pierce was Father Pat Umberger, pastor of St. Patrick’s in Onalaska, where the newly ordained priest has been assigned.

CT/Franz Klein

Outside the cathedral following the ordination liturgy, Father Jesse Burish gives a first blessing to his parents, David and Marie Burish of St. Matthew’s Parish in Wausau.

CT/Stan Gould

Preceding Bishop ListECKI, the five new priests process out of the cathedral following the ordination liturgy.

CT/Franz Klein

Father Victor Feltes shares the Eucharistic prayer with Bishop Listecky following his ordination. Each of the five men recited a portion of the prayer as they concelebrated Mass for the first time with the bishop and other priests who were present.