

Archbishop ListECKI returns to ordain two new priests

By Franz Klein

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LA CROSSE – Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI returned to the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman May 29 to ordain two men to the priesthood for the Diocese of La Crosse, which has been without a bishop since he left to become archbishop of Milwaukee at the end of last year.

“It is my honor to thank Archbishop ListECKI for returning to the diocese to carry out these ordinations to the priesthood,” Monsignor Richard Gilles, diocesan administrator, said in his public remarks after the ordination liturgy. “On behalf of the newly ordained and all the faithful of the diocese and the priests, thank you, Archbishop, for being here with us today.”

Monsignor Gilles’ comments were met with sustained applause from the hundreds of priests and faithful – including a significant number from the eastern portion of the diocese – in attendance for the priestly ordination of Paul Hoffman, 62, of St. Alexander Parish in Port Edwards and Timothy Oudenhoven, 27, of St. Bronislava Parish in Plover.

Dozens of priests and laity from elsewhere were also present for the two-hour ceremony, as were Chicago Auxiliary Bishop George J. Rassas and a busload of parishioners from St. Celestine’s in Elmwood Park, Ill., where Oudenhoven worked while he was a seminarian at Mundelein Seminary near Chicago.

Father Martin Barnum was at the ordination as Mundelein Seminary’s official representative. Father Peter Uglietto, rector of Blessed John XXIII Seminary in Weston, Mass., where Hoffman undertook his preparatory studies, was also in attendance.

“It was a beautiful liturgy,” Father Uglietto said afterward. “The music was outstanding, and the only thing that topped it were the wonderful words of Archbishop ListECKI. His words were both profound but also personal as he spoke to each one of the ordinands, encouraging them in their new role as priests. He encouraged them to be true shepherds of Christ’s flock.”

Father Uglietto was referring to Archbishop ListECKI’s homily in which the archbishop told the ordinandi that they would be transformed profoundly when he laid hands on them and ordained them as priests.

"To the external eyes you will appear no different," Archbishop ListECKI said while Oudenhoven and Hoffman sat before him on stools and listened attentively. "All people will notice are the shiny collars and the new black suits. They will address you as 'Father.' And there will be tremendous interest in your vocation story. However, the true change will be internal. Your life will be marked with a commitment to Christ and His Church."

The archbishop noted that, for the liturgy, the two men had chosen the Gospel passage in which Christ asks St. Peter three times if he loves Him. "My brothers, you cannot limit yourselves by supposing this question is posed merely to Simon Peter," he said. "You must understand that Jesus is asking you, Paul, you, Tim, 'Do you love Me?'"

"This love that the Lord is demanding of you, Tim and Paul," the archbishop continued, "is an unconditional love that mirrors the sacrificial love that the Lord has for us. This is the nature of your priesthood and the love that feeds and tends His Church. You, my brothers, are called to follow that sacrificial nature of Jesus, for through His unconditional love we have been reconciled and once again made whole."

Archbishop ListECKI told the ordinandi that through their service "those hungry among us will be nourished; the dignity of life will be protected from the moment of conception to natural death; the alienated reconciled and glad tidings offered to the lowly."

"It will not be easy," the archbishop added. "You serve a Church that has been damaged by those who did not follow the teachings and disciplines of the Church, a society that questions the Church's authenticity and many who suffer indifference to the message you will proclaim."

He counseled them to remain close to Christ and to allow Him to provide strength and support. "Your preaching will console some and disturb others," he said. "But your faithfulness to Christ and the Church's teaching should never be questioned, and your compassion for all should emulate Christ's love on the cross, reflected in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass you offer. Slowly your life will become the external reality of the internal change that occurs today."

Then the archbishop and everybody in attendance prayed the Litany of the Saints, invoking their help and assistance. One at a time, Hoffman and Oudenhoven came forward and the archbishop laid hands on them silently, ordaining them as priests.

They were then vested in the stole and chasuble of the priesthood. Vesting newly ordained Father Hoffman was Father Al Wierzba, pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven in Wisconsin Rapids. Vesting newly ordained Father Oudenhoven were Fathers Joseph Hirsch, vocations director for the diocese and vicar for priests, and Lawrence Hennessey, a professor at Mundelein.

Their hands were then anointed with sacred chrism, and the archbishop presented them with a chalice and paten containing the elements of bread and wine. They then exchanged the sign of peace with the archbishop and other clergy who were present.

The two newly ordained priests then joined Archbishop ListECKI in sharing the Eucharistic prayer for the very first time.

Following the liturgy, Father Hirsch spoke briefly and emphasized the role of families in promoting vocations. "All vocations come from the family," he said. "We would not have any of these priests if not for the families from which they came. Thank you for encouraging vocations."

Father Hirsch also thanked the priests of the diocese for inviting young men to consider the priesthood and those who pray and give financially in support of vocations. "I want to take this opportunity to thank these groups of people because it is through your help, your intercession, your prayers, your support, that we have these new priests here today."

Neil Printz of St. Adalbert Parish in Rosholt was among the faithful who traveled to La Crosse for the ordination. "We know Father Tim – I have to get used to saying that – through marriage prep in the deanery in Stevens Point," he said. "He's done retreats with us on the weekends. It's been great to hear him speak, and now to hear him preach from the pulpit would be even better. I'm looking forward to his priesthood and we're praying for his continued success."

Monsignor Gilles announced after the ordination that Father Hoffman's first assignment would be as parochial vicar at Our Lady Queen of Heaven and the new chaplain and instructor of religion at Assumption High School and Assumption Middle School in Wisconsin Rapids.

Father Oudenhoven will be assisting with vocation and youth retreats this summer and then returning to Mundelein Seminary to complete his licentiate degree in spiritual theology.

"I hope you truly understand what a wonderful diocese you have," Archbishop ListECKI said prior to the closing blessing. "God has blessed you

in so many ways. And He has blessed this diocese once again this year by giving you two priests, Father Paul and Father Tim.”