

Good evening. How about those Browns? I sure am grateful that CBS and the NFL have Thursday Night Football and not Friday Night Football! Thank you for being here. What a wonderful way to begin this 198th Diocesan Convention, with ordinations and the celebration Holy Eucharist. I discovered in preparing for this evening that in Microsoft Word the word postulancy autocorrects as petulancy. I imagine there is a sermon in there somewhere, but you will be glad to know that I couldn't find it in time for tonight.

The Gospel lesson just read by Deacon Barbara is not one suggested for the ordination of a deacon, nor is it suggested for the ordination of a priest. Rather it is the one assigned for Candlemas, the 2nd of February, also referred to as the Feast of the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin or the Presentation of Our Lord. It commemorates both the restoration of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to the community forty days after childbirth and the dedication of the firstborn son to God with a sacrifice of a lamb or two birds, as required by Levitical law.

The act of presenting the firstborn is an expression of remembrance and gratitude for Israel's deliverance from slavery, and it recollects God's fidelity in the sparing of her firstborn males in the Passover event. Similar to the adoration of the Christ child by the shepherds and the visitation of the magi in Bethlehem, the presentation of Jesus by his parents in the Temple at Jerusalem came to be understood by early Christians as a presentation of the Messiah to the world, the gift of God's own self to the world God loves.

Into my prayer for Shawn and Peter these last few weeks, and into my prayer for this 198th Convention of the Diocese of Ohio, this passage from Luke's gospel has repeatedly come forward. As I have prayed for these two ordinands, I have been filled with gratitude for all those who, in one way or another, have presented them to God and to the Church for Christian ministry. Those who presented them at their baptism. Those who presented them at their confirmation. Those serving on vestries and discernment committees and Commissions on Ministry and Standing Committees who presented them for postulancy and candidacy and ordination. Like Jesus in the Temple, all of us are presented in varying ways to God for God's mission, presented to God that God might make of us what God imagines and use us as God wills.

Sean and Peter have likewise been presented once again, tonight in this holy temple, presented by their families and colleagues and mentors and friends, presented on behalf of us and all the people of this diocese, lay and ordained. They have been offered again to God, each for a service that they will now grow into, just as the Christ child was to grow into that for which he was presented to God by his parents. And we have promised to continue to hold them up to God and support them in carrying out that into which God is provoking them, calling them forth.

In this way we continue the ancient practice of our spiritual forbearers in committing one another to God. It is a practice we do at particular milestones along our spiritual journeys, in the liturgies of baptism, confirmation, matrimony, ordination, and burial, and of course every time in the celebration of Holy Eucharist when we, as St. Paul instructed the fledgling church in Rome, "offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee..."

The offering of ourselves to God is a spiritual discipline, carried out in our personal prayer, in our corporate worship, and in our service to others, over and over again, that we might come to give ourselves fully, emptying ourselves as did Jesus, and be filled with divine grace and intention. This is at the heart of the vocation to be Christian, and it is to be modeled by the clergy, as articulated in their examination and ordination vows.

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Being offered to God for God's use and mission is, of course, only one aspect of presentation reflected in the story Luke recounts in this Gospel passage. The other is the presentation of Christ to the world, as represented not only in his parents' faithful action in the Temple, but in the reactions of Simeon and Anna. And it is Anna's response that is informative to us tonight. We know only of her what is reported here: that she was the child of Phanuel (whether that was her mother or father is unclear), that she was a widow of many years, and that, at 84, she was a revered religious leader and a fixture in the Temple. At the moment Jesus was presented, Luke proclaims, Anna "began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." In other words, Anna began to present the Christ to the world, herself.

That is what we are called to do, Shawn, Peter, and each one of us, individually and as a body. We are called to present the Christ to a world that is aching for redemption and reconciliation. We are called to present to the world compassion, generosity, patience, advocacy, accountability, and justice. And we are called to present to others a relationship with the God who loves them. No exceptions.

The prophet Anna was an Asherite, a member of a tribe recognized for wisdom. She was credible to a wide and needy community because of who she was. Her age, her heritage, and her disciplined faith, all things given her by God, gave her all she needed. And because she was a person of prayer, disciplined prayer, God gave her confidence that she was just what God needed. Anna was one of the first witnesses to the savior, not an observer, not just one who recognized his divinity, but one who witnessed to it. "At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

We are each called as individuals, and we are all called together as a body, to witness to the saving love of God in Christ Jesus. As Christians, our vocation is to present Jesus to the world by our words and actions, in our local communities, in this diocese, and across the world. "They will know we are Christians by our love," we sing in the Peter Scholtes hymn based on John 13. But we might also sing, "They will know Christ by our love." Through ministries of mercy – feeding, clothing, housing, teaching. Like St. Matthew's, Toledo which just bought a house for a single mother struggling with MS who had been evicted from her previous home, or St. Stephen's, East Liverpool, whose monthly Good Shepherd lunch program has grown to feeding the bodies and spirits of more than 300 people at each meal. Through similar food pantries, community meals, homeless shelters, reading camps, prison visiting, prayer shawls, after school programs, and countless other ministries, parishioners across our diocese present our Lord to the world, day in and day out.

In this fall's leadership conferences sponsored by the diocesan Office for Congregations and Christian Formation, Brad Purdom and David Bargetzi provided resources specifically designed to help parishes explore how to get into their neighborhoods, creating opportunities for presenting Jesus beyond the church walls. Attendants recognized not only the potential mission field outside their doors, but the resources they already had, indeed the resource they already were, regardless of their congregational size and demographics, resources for presenting the faith, hope, and love of Jesus.

Last spring, after three unsuccessful years trying to secure the domain name noexceptions.org, I tried again and found this time that GoDaddy.com was ready and able to get it for us. (You're impressed that I know anything at all about GoDaddy, aren't you? I know, you think that my computer still says, "You've got mail!") Not only do we now have the URL, but as a result we are working to design a vehicle that will reach those who might not otherwise look to organized religion to find a response to their spiritual yearning. Noexceptions.org could be an inviting and engaging way to present to them the relationship with God that they are seeking though may not believe they deserve, the relationship that God is seeking to have with them. Tomorrow we will ask your help in imagining how we all might more fully live into "God loves you. No exceptions."

And Planting for Tomorrow, Growing in Faith Today is all about the presentation of Jesus to the world. Tomorrow I will report on the specifics of how the campaign is going, but tonight I want to describe where it is going. Through the collaborative parish campaigns, two dozen congregations are underway, increasing participation and enthusiasm as they raise much needed resources for strengthening infrastructure and program. 24 parishes is 50% more than the 16 that the campaign projected would be necessary to be successful. And eight of them have already surpassed their goals, investing in a future that will allow them to reach beyond themselves in the presentation of Jesus to the communities they serve.

The proposed camp and retreat program has begun partnering with other northern Ohio institutions and industries, like the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine's Urban Health Initiative, whose Executive Director wrote me just yesterday, "It was such a pleasure seeing you and the [site]. I can't stop talking about it with people because it's such a vitally needed and exciting opportunity. However I can help, please let me know." Likewise, the Cleveland Botanical Garden's School Garden Program, the Oberlin Project, and Veggie U's healthy food awareness programs, to name a few, all are committed to the same spiritual mandates of environmental fidelity, stewardship of creation, physical and spiritual wellness, and healthy nutrition for all, to which we in the church have a primary responsibility to witness. Each of these partners wants to work with us to provide immersion programs and other opportunities that change lives and transform the ways we live.

With the help of Eric Barbato, a registered nurse, PhD student, and intern on the diocesan staff, we are developing camp programming for children with serious illness, and building the necessary supporting partnerships with hospitals and nursing schools, so that every child can have the life-giving experience of summer camp. Under Katie Ong-Landini's guidance, we are pursuing relationships with renewable energy industries and innovative water reclamation and

waste treatment companies to imagine how they might help build a facility whose very vocation is to teach the world how to live with more care for God's creation. All of these are ways through which we present the promise and challenge of faithful living to the world.

Like Anna, the daughter of Phanuel and prophet of the tribe of Asher, we are called to be a people who, supported by a discipline of prayer and worship, can witness boldly to the love of God. Like Anna we can present Jesus to a world in need of redemption and healing, inviting others into a companionship with the spirit of holiness that will give deeper meaning and direction to their lives. And whoever you are, however you got here, whatever your gifts or inadequacies, whatever your hopes and fears, you are just who God needs for the presentation of Jesus today, not because of who you are, but because of who God is. As individuals, as congregations, and as a diocese, we are equipped to present the Holy Child to others; when we present our true selves to God, when we give ourselves to God again and again, when we empty ourselves that God might fill us with godliness, then are we able to present Jesus to others with our very lives.

At this fall's Clergy Day I shared with those present a poem by the Wisconsin poet and Episcopalian Elizabeth Rooney, entitled "Oblation," which well describes the discipline of self-presentation that results in the presentation of Jesus.

Oblation

I hope each day

To offer less to You,

Each day

By Your great love to be

Diminished

Until at last I am

So decreased by Your hand

And You, so grown in me,

That my whole offering

Is just an emptiness

For You to fill

Or not

According to Your will.

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Shawn and Peter, we present you tonight that you might be filled by God, according to God's will. We present you for ministries that God is dreaming for you, ministries of service and blessing and care, ministries by which you will accompany us in presenting Jesus to the world. And with you, we present as well "our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto [God]," that we likewise will be so filled with the spirit of Christ that together we may present him, in all that we do, to a world hungering for peace and redemption.

As we begin this 198th year of the Diocese of Ohio, we stand with you at the advent of a new season of ministry for you and for ourselves, as individuals and as the larger church, a new opportunity to present the Christ who is our salvation to a world ever yearning to be saved.

Amen.

The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop of Ohio