

Dear friends,

at the beginning of this Eucharist and Ordination, I extend a warm welcome to the Scalabrini deacons Jeff Noël, Khiem Nguyen Tien and Tam Nguyen Van and especially to you their parents, relatives, and companions who follow us from home, via your television sets or electronic devices. Despite physical separation, your presence, love and prayer embrace Jeff, Khiem and Tam, your sons, brothers, companions and friends. Welcome to the Superiors and members of the Scalabrini community here in the parish of Santa Maria Regina Pacis.

Let us make our entrance with today's responsorial psalm 94:

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;

let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

Come, let us bow down in worship;

let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,

and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

With Psalm 94, let's join in gratefully and reverently, with confidence and the greatest joy. Now the first honest step is to acknowledge and confess our sins:

Homily

Dear brothers and sisters,

The words of Psalm 94 have already welcomed us here with the parents, relations and friends following from afar. Before Jeff, Khiem and Tam receive the sacrament of Holy Orders, let us take our bearings in the world today into which the new missionary priests are being sent.

The "sick economy ... the fruit of unequal economic growth"¹, with its only law of profit, is not uniting nations and bringing us together, but keeps on widening the gap between those who possess too much and those who have less and less. Humanity risks losing any fidelity to God and is taking paths of self-destruction.

Covid-19 has suddenly and dramatically highlighted the worsening forms of iniquity and social injustice that affect those many who have no voice at the table of the powerful and remain excluded from the decisions that also directly affect them. The future seems more and more at risk.

¹ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 26.08.2020.

Within such a world, I begin with God asking Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” Cain answers with a question of denial, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9)

In fact Cain, having murdered Abel, has already given history’s worst answer. For to the question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” the only good and correct answer is YES I am. YES you are. YES we all are.

St Paul agrees. “Love one another”, says the letter to the Romans, “love your neighbour as yourself” (Rm 13:8,10). We know what we shouldn’t do, such as commit adultery or steal; but how do we live out the commandment of love?

In today’s Gospel, Jesus provides practical advice for making love work in a community when a member doesn’t love but sins, does “evil to the neighbour” (Rm 13:10).

Sin and community conflict require fraternal correction. Jesus recommends that we proceed carefully and respectfully in three steps to help those who stray to migrate back into true communion and health.

The first step should be one-on-one dialogue. If it succeeds, there is no more beautiful gratitude than when someone thanks you for having taken the risk to reach out and help him or her out of danger.

The second approach is pastoral. Gather two or three others – Jesus speaks of “witnesses” – and reach out together with love, as occurs in our usual pastoral activities. Such outreach often works quietly, and only God knows the good that has been done. Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, with wisdom and great concreteness, said to his priests: "Preach the truth with charity"² so sinners may be converted.

The third response is of the local community. It takes a public form. The parish or the diocese advocates for life, for fairness, for inclusion, for greater justice. This is typically the Scalabrini mission “to announce to the world the possibility of living communion in diversity, breaking down the walls of discrimination, injustice, inequality and building bridges of encounter, solidarity and fraternity in Christ Jesus”³. All these are Christ’s graces taking away the sins of the world.

If none of this works, says Jesus, treat the recalcitrant offender “as you would a Gentile or a tax collector” because they have excluded themselves from the community. As priests you will exercise forgiveness and reconciliation, bringing you close to those who acknowledge their sins; at the same time, you’ll be educating Christians to fraternal correction and rebuilding broken relationships.

The Lord ensures his presence where "two or three are gathered together in his name", but it is by no means taken for granted that these "two or three" live exactly as they should. However, Jesus knows this and promises to be "in their midst", not because of our excellent merit, but because of

2 G.B. Scalabrini, *Pentecost Homily*, 1902.

3 Final Document of the XV Chapter, 2018.

his own great faithfulness. By mandating you priests to forgive sins (Jn 20:22-23), he consecrates you as instruments of his mercy and enables you to keep the Church united, even though she is composed of imperfect sinful people.

Now God addresses you, Jeff, Khiem and Tam, with his words to Ezekiel: "I have set you as a sentinel for the house of Israel" (Ez 33:7). In prophetic writings, the one whom God sends is often called a sentinel or guard to watch over the people, to protect them from danger. Learn to "blow the horn" in the face of the many forms of sin that creep from the human heart into the structures of society and into the Church. As priests you will be "sentinels" of the Lord sent to guard his flock.

As priests and people let us "keep our gaze firmly fixed on Jesus" as Pope Francis exhorts us in his August catechesis; "In the midst of this pandemic, [keep] our eyes on Jesus; and with this *faith* embrace the *hope* of the Kingdom of God that Jesus Himself brings us."⁴ We give thanks to God for three new missionary priests to help Jesus realize the divine plan in the world, in history and in the Church. "This plan was fully revealed in Christ himself, who was sent by the Father 'to bring glad tidings to the poor' and 'to gather into one all the dispersed children of God.' Even now this plan can be discerned in the events, the needs, and the longings of people. The world to which [you Scalabrini are] called to proclaim the mystery of salvation is that of migrants".⁵

Now we shall invoke the Holy Spirit to ordain these our three sons and brothers to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Card. Michael Czerny S.J.

4 Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 5.08.2020, with reference to Heb 12:2, Mk 1:5; Mt 4:17; CCC 2816.

5 Scalabrini Rules of Life, 1.