Dear brothers and sisters, welcome to St. Mary’s Cathedral for this great day, a day we have all been waiting for. As the saying goes, better late than never! I welcome first Bishop Richard Higgins, the auxiliary bishop emeritus of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, who is a personal friend of the Seitz family. Your Excellency, we are honored to have you with us. I welcome all of my brother priests, who are here in such great numbers, and our deacons and seminarians and religious who also are called to special roles of service in the Church. And I especially welcome the family and friends of our three ordinandi. You in a special way have accompanied these men on their journey, and I know you rejoice with me and with them on this happy day.

My brothers and sisters, you are present to witness a beautiful and holy event, the ordination of these brothers of ours as priests of Jesus Christ. This is the culmination of a long journey of prayer and preparation, joys and challenges, and we thank God for bringing them to this sacred moment. What you witness here has been happening in the Church from the very beginning: Jesus chooses certain followers to be his companions and co-workers, to be teachers, priests, and shepherds. He invites them to unite their own lives to his, and to share in the mission that he received from his heavenly Father. Just as the Father sent Jesus into the world and anointed him in the Holy Spirit, so now he chooses and sends these men, who are to be ordained as his priests.

It’s probably an understatement to say that we are living in strange and uncertain times. The shadow of illness hangs over our nation and our world, including our own local communities and maybe our own families. The turmoil and upheaval of recent months has left people unsettled and uncertain about the future. Things that once seemed secure have become unsteady, and many people feel adrift in a stormy sea, wondering what the future will hold. But through it all Christ remains with us, and he will not abandon his Church. He will always remain faithful, and a sign of that faithfulness is the very priesthood that we celebrate today. Jesus gives the gift of the priesthood to provide for his people, and these brothers of ours, who will soon become priests, are a living proof of his eternal care for all of us.

My sons, I would offer you a few priestly examples to consider as you begin your own priestly lives and ministry. First, I would propose St. Junipero Serra, who came as a missionary to this new world in order to share the Gospel and the gift of faith with the native peoples of this land. He left everything behind and courageously set out on an entirely new path because of his desire to answer God’s call to the mission of Jesus. You too are called to be missionaries right here in North Dakota, those whom our Lord sends out so that all might experience his mercy and his love. No matter where you serve in your priesthood, know that our Lord continues to send you to his people, to those who await the grace that he offers through you.

I also propose the example of Blessed Stanley Rother, a priest of these United States who went to serve the missions of Latin America. He had a great love for the poor and the downtrodden, and with great courage he ministered in the midst of violence and fear. Eventually he was martyred because of his priestly commitment to the people he served. He could have fled to a safer assignment, but he chose to remain where he was. He is sometimes called the “shepherd who didn’t run.” My sons, in your own way, you too must lay down your lives for your brothers and sisters. For a priest, there is no greater love than making an offering of your life to Jesus so that he might make of you an instrument of his mercy. You
might not be called to martyrdom, but you are called to be witnesses, *martyres*, of Christ, both in season and out of season.

And finally, I offer you the priestly example of Fr. Michael McGivney, who is well-known as the founder of the Knights of Columbus. Fr. McGivney will be beatified this fall as a sign of his holiness and his pastoral charity. First and foremost, he was a parish priest, and he did all the ordinary things that a parish priest did. He preached the Gospel, he taught the faith, he celebrated Mass and the sacraments, and he cared for the needs of the poor. In his own humble way, he made Christ present to the immigrants who came to this country. As an ordinary parish priest, he touched the lives of countless souls, as will each one of you.

Each of these holy men has something to teach us, but most importantly, they remain images of Christ in the world as priests, prophets, and shepherds. Like them, you will offer our Lord’s sacrifice in the Mass and feed the faithful with his Body and Blood. Understand what you do, and imitate what you celebrate. You will forgive sins in his name and reconcile sinners to the God who loves them. Like these holy priests, you will proclaim the fullness of the Gospel and form the People of God in the truth that Jesus reveals, a truth that our world often rebels against. Meditate on this Word, and as the liturgy tells us, believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach. Like these saintly men you will shepherd those who are placed in your spiritual care, even those who might not want to be shepherded. As a good shepherd, go out in search of those who are lost, and foster unity in Christ among God’s people, especially in a time of division and strife. Following the example of these holy priests and countless others that we could name, strive to put the needs of Christ and his people before your own. Love them as Christ loves them, and live out the joy of one who has received mercy from our Savior. And realize, my sons, that when you pray the liturgy, and proclaim the Word of God, and guide the people in the ways of holiness, it is Jesus who does these things through you.

My dear sons, you have been called by our Lord to be his priests in an interesting time. The challenges are many, the opportunities are endless, and the grace of God is unfailing. Place all of your trust in him, and keep before your eyes Christ the Good Shepherd and High Priest, who came not to be served but to serve, who came to seek out and save what was lost.