

## **Mass for Deceased Bishops and Priests**

**Bishop John Barres**

**St. Agnes Cathedral**

**November 8, 2023**

Today we celebrate our annual Mass for deceased bishops and priests.

We pray for the deceased bishops and priests of the Diocese of Rockville Centre and deceased bishops and priests throughout history in the universal Church.

As we pray for the souls of bishops and priests, we reflect on the nature and gift of the Catholic priesthood.

We give thanks for the way bishops and priests live Luke 14 in their single-minded devotion to the will of God, their deep responses to the call of our Lord in their vocations, and in their courageous carrying of the Cross and their helping so many that they serve to carry their Crosses.

I had the privilege last Saturday at St. Joseph Seminary to ordain Deacon Dennis Gannon and Deacon Joseph Lettieri to the diaconate.

They will be ordained priests, God willing, in June.

The liturgical rites around diaconate Ordinations, priesthood Ordinations and episcopal Ordinations always help us to reflect on the theology and spirituality of the Sacrament of Holy Orders as we pray for the souls of bishops and priests today and as we remember the priests in our parishes who have served our families.

In every season of the Catholic priesthood, priests are called to a “unity of life.”

St. Bernard of Clairvaux writes: “We have to be reservoirs of prayer before we can be aqueducts of God’s grace.”

A Catholic priest’s reservoir of prayer guides the aqueducts of his evangelizing pastoral charity and guides how he celebrates the Catholic Mass and the sacraments.

We call a priest’s reverent celebration of the Mass a priest’s liturgical *ars celebrandi*.

A priest’s evangelizing pastoral charity and liturgical *ars celebrandi* also replenish, refresh and guide the priest’s reservoir of prayer.

Catholic priests are called to a unity of life that encompasses their spiritual life, their evangelizing pastoral charity, and their liturgical *ars celebrandi*.

Our Lady, St. Joseph and the great saint priests of Church history intercede for the unity of life of all priests.

When priests pray deeply, silently and contemplatively, they discern creatively with the Holy Spirit their evangelizing pastoral charity, and their liturgical *ars celebrandi* is more natural, more refined and more radiantly reverent.

In turn, the priest's evangelizing pastoral charity, in all its dimensions, expands and directs his spiritual life and fine-tunes his liturgical *ars celebrandi*.

The priest's liturgical *ars celebrandi* at Mass not only strengthens the full, active and conscious participation of the People of God but also sharpens and deepens his spiritual life and *lectio divina* and helps him to be conformed to the Paschal Mystery in his evangelizing pastoral charity.

Last Wednesday, we celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints. We remembered so many priest saints in history and asked their intercession for holiness in the priesthood and for a rich new harvest of vocations to the priesthood.

We remembered our American priest brothers St. John Neumann, Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney, Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey and Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother.

We remembered St. John Vianney (the patron of all priests), St. Pierre Julien Eymard, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John Bosco, St. Padre Pio and so many others.

Last Thursday, we celebrated All Souls' Day and we remembered the souls of priests – in a special way, all those priests who have served in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

At St. Joseph's Seminary and at our Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, the walls are filled with the Ordination Class portraits of all the priests who have been formed at these seminaries and who have served in these dioceses.

It is very moving to walk these halls, study these Ordination class pictures and recognize one of our parish priests or a priest we knew long ago.

It's a moving experience to think of the priests we have known in the course of our lives in our parishes, when we were in college, when we commuted into New York City and stopped into a Church for confession or daily Mass.

We pray for the priests who baptized us, who heard our confessions, who gave us our first communion and who married us.

We pray for the bishops, successors of the Apostles, who confirmed us, ordained us and led us in their ministry of teaching, preaching and sanctifying.

We pray fervently for their souls today and we pray for a deep and rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood for the Church's mission.