

Priesthood Ordination Remarks 2024

Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

June 8, 2024

June is the month of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and today we celebrate Our Lord's gift of two new priests, two new shepherds after His own heart!

As your Bishop and the Successor of the Apostles on Long Island, I am pleased to present to you, the People of God, Fr. Dennis Gannon and Fr. Joseph Lettieri.

Brothers, you have been ordained to serve, and I am pleased to announce again your first assignments where you will begin a lifetime of priestly service.

You are both graduates of Chaminade High School and so are sons of the Marianists and Blessed William Joseph Chaminade whose canonization we pray for today.

Fr. Gannon, you will serve at the parish of Saints Philip and James in St. James with the new pastor Fr. Sean Magaldi. You grew up as a parishioner of St. Aidan's parish in Williston Park and are a graduate of Holy Child Academy, Chaminade and St. John's University.

Your MA paper at St. Joseph's Seminary was entitled, "*The Last Acceptable Prejudice*" *Examining the History of Anti-Catholicism in New York State 1689-2020*. It is a very fine and insightful synthesis of the Catholic Church's history in New York State and the tragic theme of anti-Catholicism from the Colonial Period to the Present. It also examines how great American saints have overcome with heroic charity what some call "the last acceptable American prejudice."

Fr. Lettieri, you will serve at the parish of St. Dominic in Oyster Bay with the pastor Msgr. Thomas More Coogan. You grew up as a parishioner of St. William the Abbot parish in Seaford. You are a graduate of St. William the Abbot School and a graduate of our Vicar General, Fr. Eric Fasano's Altar Server Training Boot

Camp. You are a graduate of Chaminade and the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Your MA paper at St. Joseph's Seminary was entitled, *A Study of Gothic Form, Its Roots in Scholasticism, and Its Effect in Liturgy*. It is a very fine and insightful work of theological, liturgical, historical, artistic and architectural synthesis.

Brothers, today you are surrounded by much love and affection. Allow me to express my deep gratitude to your families, who formed you into the men you have become.

I thank Bishop James Massa and the faculties of St. Joseph's Seminary and the Cathedral Seminary Residence for their fine work of preparing you for the priesthood.

Our Vocation Directors, Fr. Sean Magaldi and Fr. Joe Fitzgerald, assisted Fr. Gannon and Fr. Lettieri and helped to shepherd them throughout their seminary years.

I'm grateful to Fr. Magaldi for his years serving as our Diocesan Vocation Director, and I'm grateful to Fr. Walter Kedjierski who will begin as the Director of Seminarians later in June and work with Fr. John Crozier, who will succeed Fr. Magaldi as Diocesan Vocation Director.

My gratitude goes to them and to all the bishops, pastors, priests, deacons, religious and parishioners who walked with you in your pastoral assignments. Their holy example, pastoral charity and artistry will remain with you throughout your priesthood.

Fr. William Slattery's book *Heroism and Genius: How Catholic Priests Helped Build – and Can Help Rebuild – Western Civilization* is an historical survey of how the great Popes, Bishops and Priests of history – such figures as St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, Pope St. Leo the Great, Pope St. Gregory the Great and so many others – were Divine Mercy instruments of the Risen Christ in Salvation and World history.

But what strikes me most is Fr. Slattery's conclusion. It expresses powerfully why we are here today for this Priesthood Ordination in St. Agnes Cathedral.

Fr. Slattery writes: “The priests whom we have recalled in these pages belong largely to the front ranks of heroism and genius; they are on the cover of Western civilization’s narrative, and there is little fear that they will ever be forgotten. But there were so many others who were, and will remain, quiet unsung heroes, the ordinary yet so extraordinary priests who quietly worked and prayed and shepherded their people – and made an eternal difference to eternal souls. The quiet priests, those men of God who, through the centuries, as the hidden guardians of humanity, guided their people to the gates of Heaven on the pathways of the sacraments. They stood as sentinels on the ramparts of the city, watching over the destinies of men who, often insensitive to their peril, slept on. They were the ones who offered their own bodies to shield their flocks from the greatest danger the naïve world so often ignores: sin, and the lord of sin, the Prince of Darkness; men who worked for the greatest liberation the world is in need of, eternal salvation; men who empowered the attainment of the greatest good, pure and undying joy in the Beatific Vision of the eternity of eternities.”¹

The consecration and mission of Catholic priests reflect the change in their very being, their very “ontology” that occurs on the day of their Ordination to the Priesthood.

The unity of life expressed in their spiritual lives, their evangelizing pastoral charity and their liturgical *ars celebrandi* inspires us. Their three-fold mission of teaching, sanctifying and governing our parishes lights the Church on Long Island with the power of the Risen Christ and the mission of mercy of the Church that Jesus Himself founded.

At our Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, and at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers, 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.

They will soon include the pictures of Fr. Dennis Gannon and Fr. Joseph Lettieri.

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.

¹ Fr. William J. Slattery, *Heroism and Genius: How Catholic Priests Helped Build – and Can Help Rebuild – Western Civilization*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 244

It's almost as if these priests in these Ordination pictures look at us as we look at them.

They compel us and they implore us to be steadfast and strong in our Catholic faith.

They urge us to pray for all priests – those priests who have been ordained in the last hour like Fr. Gannon and Fr. Lettieri and those priests who are in their last hours on earth.

They encourage us to throw the nets of Eucharistic love in our National Eucharistic Revival as National Eucharistic Pilgrimages across the country prepare to converge and meet at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis this July.

It is deeply moving for me to look out at all of you, as the Successor of the Apostles on Long Island, and to know how deeply you all understand how critical the Catholic priesthood is to the mission of the Church and to the World.

In solidarity with Fr. Gannon and Fr. Lettieri and in tribute to them today, we pray for a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood on Long Island and the universal Church.

All of us are looking forward to the completion of the renovation of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris – a Catholic wonder of the world in its evangelizing Gothic architecture.

G.K. Chesterton once described the purpose of Gothic architecture in these words: “The spired Church was not merely meant to strike the stars like an arrow; it was also meant to shake the earth like an explosion.”²

Let's use Chesterton's image for Gothic architecture as an image also for the Catholic priesthood.

“The Catholic priesthood was not merely meant to strike the stars like an arrow; it was also meant to shake the earth like an explosion!”

² As quote in Fr. William J. Slattery, *Heroism and Genius: How Catholic Priests Helped Build – and Can Help Rebuild – Western Civilization*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 200.

Fr. Lettieri and Fr. Gannon, may your living of the Catholic priesthood strike the stars like an arrow and shake the earth like an explosion!

God bless you, your families and the People of God of Long Island on this day of your Ordination to the Priesthood!

