

## Servant, Shepherd and Scalabrinians

(Homily of +Ruperto Cruz Santos, Bishop of Balanga during the Ordination to the Sacred Order of the Presbyterate of the Missionaries of Saint Charles-Scalabrinians on Monday, May 8, 2017 at the National Shrine of Mount Carmel, Broadway Avenue, Quezon City at 9 a.m.)

Father Delmar Silva, CS, Provincial-Superior of the Australia-Asia Province of the Missionaries of Saint Charles-Scalabrinians; Father Mariano Cisco, CS, Rector of the Scalabrinian Theology-Local Superior; My brother-priests, Beloved parents, relatives and friends of our Ordinandi, Our dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

Congratulations and best wishes to our Ordinandi:

Reverend Peter Nguyen Tuan Vu, CS  
Reverend Joseph Doan ThanhTinh, CS  
Reverend Joseph Tran QuocBao, CS  
Reverend Joanchim Nguyen Minh Toan, CS

Let us give them a round of applause. You are all reverend, honored and very much esteemed. In a little while you will be priests, and I assure you your lives will be changed. You will be addressed *Father*. Each of you will be recognized as man of God, and will be known as *alter Christus*. With that grace and God's gift of ordination to the sacred order of Presbyterate, you will have to be reminded who you really are and what you should be. And I take this spirit-filled occasion to tell you the three things that you must be as priests:

You are just **servants**.  
You are **shepherds**.  
You are also stairways, **scala**, Scalabrinians.

**First**, you are just **servants**. As priests, we are called by God. He calls us by our name. It is a personal call from God, issued not by proxy and not accidentally. It is God Himself who intentionally and intimately wants us to be with Him. He wants us to be with Him, and only for Him.

God calls us for His own purpose, for His only desire and aim to serve Him and to be servants for others. And so as priests, we are just His **servants**. You are not the superiors. You are not the *lords*. And you are not the masters. As priests we just receive orders and we fulfill them. We are just given commands and we follow. Simply put, we are at the service of God; mere ordinary workers for His people.

We are not called for fame and glory. We are not chosen for honors and higher positions. We are ordained, as you best describe in your invitation "*to serve and to give his life*" (Matthew 20:28).

Our priestly life is best summarized by being servant. One who is always serving; always laboring. We are not ordained to relax and have a vacation. We are not being sent to be safe or to be secure in our life. As priests, we are to serve and to do sacrifices, to be uncertain about what will come next. We are servants of Christ, following Him to suffer and save souls.

Your holy founder, Saint Giovanni Battista Scalabrini affirms, "*Without doubt, we are in the hands of God, but we must not sit there lazily.*" We are priests, ready to go, available for labor.

In 1880, at the Milan Central railroad station in Italy when Bishop Giovanni Battista Scalabrini met around five hundred migrants who were waiting and ready to take the train for Genova, and from there to board a ship for America. Seeing them like the Biblical who "*were like sheep without a shepherd*" (Mark 6:34) the Bishop, characteristic compassion and tenderness asked them, "*What can I do to help you?*"

Let this be, my dear Ordinandi, your question also to our people: *how can I serve you? How can I assist you? How can I ever help you?*

And according to the story, they replied, "*Give us a priest. Send us a priest.*"

Now, my dear reverend deacons you are the answers. You will be priests to be sent out, to go forth to serve and save them.

**Second, as shepherds.** As priests, God wants us not to be just at His side. God wants us to unite ourselves with Him. As priests we don't just represent Jesus. We don't only share Jesus. We don't only imitate Jesus. We are Jesus in persona. Uniting ourselves with Him, we become Jesus to others. We are His voice, speaking words of forgiveness. We are His heart, caring for the marginalized and migrants; loving the least and the lost; and practicing His mercy. We are His hands, working for the needy and helping the outcast. And so as priests, we are His **shepherds**. We know our sheep and they come to know us.

When Jesus described Himself, He said "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:14). The adjective used is "*good*." As His shepherds we must be good to our people. We are not called to be popular or *pogi* shepherds. We are not chosen to be powerful or rich shepherds. We are true shepherds, good shepherds.

As good shepherds we don't have to be choosy or selective with our sheep, with our people. As good shepherds we don't pastor only when it is comfortable for us; only when it is most convenient to us. As a pastor, Saint Giovanni Battista lived out his priestly ministry with this motto, "*Make yourself everything to everyone.*"

My dear Ordinandi, make yourselves available to all anytime and anywhere. There should never be any favoritism, and never be exclusive to any particular group, family or person. Our vow of countenance consecrates us completely and totally to God and for His Church. There should never be divided loyalties. Our heart and our whole being are unconditionally for Christ, for His purpose and His mission alone.

**And the last is stairways.** It is our task as priests to seek out our people and lead them back to God. We help them to become worthy before God and thus be united with Him in friendship and love. With what we celebrate and how we preach, we desire for them to experience and receive God's mercy and forgiveness. We serve and we shepherd our people in order to save them so they can gain eternal life. We are their stairway so that they may climb up to the Kingdom in heaven. As priests we are God's ladder so that our good Lord can impart through us, His loving and saving works.

Let us remember then that the episcopal motto of your holy founder, Saint Giovanni Battista, is taken from the Book of Genesis chapter twenty-eight, verse twelve. It is written, "*Video Dominum in summitate scabrae,*" that is, "*I see the Lord at the top of the stairway.*"

Life is a journey. We are all travelling towards God. Life is migration. We are all on a pilgrimage to Heaven, our true home. You are Scalabrinians. Be sure, that as their priests, your people will get there and find God at the top of the stairway, with a welcoming embrace.

You are priests, Scalabrinians, God's ladders. Bring our people to the shore of safety, and not to the sea of destruction; lead our people to the land of salvation, and not to the valley of shame and sins. Accompany them in their climb up the ladder of success, and never let yourself be the cause of their division and downfall.

You are priests, God's stairs. Give our people strength to persevere with their earthly pilgrimage of faith. Grant to them the grace and blessing of God through your dedicated priesthood. And with you and because of you, *scabrae*, let God descend upon them.

Yes, my dear Ordinandi, within a few moments you will be priests. Let the last words of your holy founder, Saint Giovanni Battista Scalabrini be your first and constant words as you fulfill your priestly ministry, as servants, shepherds and the stairway to heaven. Do as he finally said, "***Lord, I am ready, let us go.***"

+Ruperto Cruz Santos, DD

Bishop of Balanga and Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines  
Episcopal Chairman for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People