

- Fr. Peter Townsend, reverend fathers, seminarians, family and friends of Fr. Townsend, and parishioners of St. Ann's, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to this very happy event.
- Father, after years of study, discernment, and perseverance, you have finally joined the most sublime, most mysterious, and most joyful of fraternities: the sacred priesthood of Jesus Christ.
- For 20 years I've looked upon you as a son. But from here on out, I get to know you as a brother and a father as well.
- Watching you grow up, seeing you progress through our ranks of altar boys, and having a small hand in your formation has been a tremendous joy, and with your family, I'm fiercely proud of you.
- It was probably when you were about age 9 or 10 that I began to suspect strongly you might have a vocation, and it was when you were 12 that I think we first talked about it. To see that conversation from so long ago come to fruition gives me nothing but joy.
- What I now hope you'll find as a priest is that seeing people move through life, growing from childhood into adolescence and adolescence into adulthood, making their sacraments and finding their vocations is really one of the greatest joys of being a priest, just as it is for any father.
- You see, the paternity of the priesthood is very real. While it is not biological but rather spiritual in nature, it is no less important. While there cannot be life without biological fatherhood, there's no eternal life without spiritual fatherhood.
- As spiritual fathers we lead our parish families, protecting them from the wolves that threaten their salvation through our sound teaching and preaching, and providing for the welfare of our children through the Sacraments.
- It is the priestly father who begets supernatural life through the Sacrament of Baptism. We nourish and feed our children with the Eucharist. We heal their souls in the Sacraments of Confession and the Anointing of the Sick.
- This is precisely why the members of the Church call us "Father." This title is not a mere honorific given to a figurehead. It's a recognition of a spiritual reality.
- It's a recognition that the profoundest fatherhood is not one of simple biological generation, but rather one of that generous and self-giving love that leads souls to eternal life.
- The model for our priestly paternity, of course, is none other than God the Father, Whom we honor in a particular way on this magnificent Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. And so a priest's paternity must resemble that of God's if it is to be authentic. What does this mean?
- It means that, like God the Father, we must be merciful and patient, ever ready to sacrifice, all-loving, generous, protective, and life-giving to all whom we meet, especially those entrusted to our care.
- We are not called to be celebrities or influencers, concerned most about personal branding or how many followers we have on Instagram. We're not called to be successful as the world measures such things. In our priesthood we are called to reveal the love of God the Father to the world, which is the deepest longing of us all.
- In John 14 the Apostle St. Philip says to Jesus: "Master, show us the Father; that will be enough for us." Good Philip was looking for a grand vision of the Heavenly Father, I suppose, to bolster his nascent faith. He was looking for that paternal love we all need.
- Of course, Jesus gently chides good Philip, saying: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
- He goes on: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing His works."

- What our blessed Lord is saying here is that He has come to do the work of the Father – to be a father of souls leading souls to the Eternal Father. And that, my dear Fr. Townsend, is what you are now called to do as a priest, as an *alter Christus*.
- When people interact with us, they should see and experience the goodness of God the Father!
- As priests of Jesus Christ, we get to show souls the path to salvation, which is a great joy. But there's a cost to such joy. There will be much suffering and sacrifice demanded of you. Yet it is through our sacrifices for our people that they come to know our fatherhood.
- Of course, the first priestly sacrifice that most people think of is celibacy – foregoing the comforts of wife and family. And while there is a sacrificial element to celibacy, it's not as bad as you think! Just ask any man who's suffered with a nagging wife for 25 or 30 years!
- In all seriousness, the sacrifice of priestly celibacy is something to treasure. While the world is quick to see celibacy as a denial, a forfeiture of fatherhood, celibacy is actually the form, the essence, of priestly fatherhood.
- We give up engendering our own physical family to be a father to every family. Celibacy is not primarily a matter of practicality for us, nor is it simply a discipline.
- We are celibate in imitation of our Lord, and to be a sign of the Kingdom to come – living reminders that man's ultimate fulfilment is not found in another person but in God alone.
- Our celibacy not only makes us available to father our people more generously. It's a sign value that, when lived joyfully, engenders a greater love for God within our people. It's an embodiment of the generous gift of self we make as priests.
- Yet, celibacy is only one sacrifice we priestly fathers make. The harder sacrifices are the demands placed upon our personal time, the challenges to our patience, the misunderstandings and harsh judgments we sometimes face, and the exigencies of obedience that contradict our own wills.
- If you live your priestly fatherhood well, Fr. Townsend, you'll often feel exhausted, with your patience stretched. You will endure the ire and injustices of those who resent the Truth you represent. And you'll learn to die to self when obliged by obedience to go against your own judgments and desires – which is the hardest sacrifice of all.
- But when you can live out your priestly paternity in these ways, I promise that your people will love you and respect you – and they will follow you as faithful children should. It's both humbling and amazing to experience the love faithful Catholics have for their priestly fathers.
- And while Catholic instincts lead the faithful to love even the worst among our ranks, the faithful are not fools. They know the priests who are provident fathers; they know the priestly fathers who will suffer, bleed, and even die for them. And they'll love you for it.
- So, Fr. Townsend, love your people well. Be quick to learn their names and spend time with them. Be patient with their shortcomings, forgive their infidelities, and earnestly pray for them. Seek out the lost, and call them to repentance – all with a father's love.
- Indeed, love all sinners, but love them without compromising or surrendering the truth. There will always be those who revile you when you faithfully uphold the Church's teachings, but on Judgment Day you'll be judged not on your popularity with the people, but on your fidelity to the Faith.
- And so, as St. Paul said to St. Timothy so long ago: “proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching... [And] you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry” (cf. 2 Timothy 4).
- Lastly, my dear son and brother, stay close to Our Lady, the Mother of Priests. It's a paradox of our priestly paternity that the one who forms us and intercedes for us most readily in our role as spiritual fathers is not a man, but a woman.

- By her intercession, you'll receive the graces necessary to be a wise and generous father.
- In closing, let me say a word of thanks to your parents, Jim and Judy Townsend. On behalf of this parish, who has watched Peter's vocation unfold, I thank you for giving the Church your son. He does you great credit.
- Trusting always in our Lord's divine mercy, may you be a courageous and humble spiritual father for the salvation of souls. May you be blessed to lead parishes as wonderful as the one who produced you.
- May our Trinitarian Lord bless you, Fr. Townsend, and may His Blessed Mother and all your patron saints keep you. By their intercession may you always be a wise, generous, and provident father.
- Ad multos annos!