

Ordination of Brian Lennstrom and Brian Gregory to the Diaconate

given at Diocesan House, Seattle

Today we celebrate the life of Jan Hus

- Born in 1372
 - He was a Czech priest and reformer, born 110 years before Martin Luther
 - He lived during the time one of the most serious crises in the Roman Catholic church: the Great Schism, the time of rival claims between two (and sometimes three) popes
- He was a Master at the University of Prague and a renowned preacher at the chapel
- He emerged as a leader in church reform:
 - Attacked the corruption among clergy and the politico-ecclesiastical connections that enriched the coffers of bishops and monarchs
 - And spoke out with prophetic force when one of the contending popes authorized the sales of indulgences to raise money for a crusade against his rival
 - Advocated a strong spirituality through frequent communion and knowledge of the scriptures
 - To that end, he translated the New Testament into the Czech vernacular
- It was his talk of reform that resulted in his being invited to the Council of Constance, which was called to resolve the schism
 - Jan Huss was invited to Council, just as a sidebar to the larger discussion, to defend his views,
 - But given that he had alienated the Archbishop of Prague and the emperor, what he really was invited to was a canonical lynching: he was convicted of heresy and burned at the stake on 6 July 1415
- His attempts to find a middle way to resolve the conflicting claims of the rival popes only added fuel to his funeral pyre
 - One side argued for the authority of the papacy in Rome based on that pope's authority as monarch in a long line of succession from the time of Peter

- The other side argued that that papal authority would be best determined by an appeal to a church council
- Robert Ellsberg, in his book *All Saints*, (all the saints who speak with a prophetic voice on the J&P issues of their times and ours) notes that
 - “Jan Hus pursued a more mystical and evangelical approach. Christ alone was head of the church. The only sure basis for reform and unity was to be found— not in any juridical conception of power—but in an understanding of communion rooted in moral conversion and holiness.
 - “To partisans on either side, the position of Jan Hus sounded, at best, unrealistic, and, at worst, a kind of dreamy anarchism.”

Unrealistic Positions and Dreamy Anarchism

- Let’s talk about unrealistic positions and dreamy anarchism in one’s life as a deacon.
- I can do this in terms of one deacon’s path to ordination, not in the spirit of self-aggrandizement but more to show the abysmal state of ignorance in which I grew up
- 1997: American Embassy; working projects like providing AMRAAM missiles for RNLAf air campaign against the Serbian armed forces in the Balkan War
- Announcement for four weeks in The Church of Our Saviour, the multinational English-speaking church in The Hague: seeking a Millennium Coordinator.
- Meeting with Fr. Sjaak de Boer to talk about it: “Great to have a Colonel in the Air Force with some organizational skills”...but organizing what?
 - Year 2000 was declared as the Year of the Jubilee (as noted in the Book of Leviticus), the 50th Year.
 - John Paul II: This was an opportunity to seek forgiveness of the \$90b un-payable debt owed by Third World Nations to the G-8 countries.
 - Proposed by JP II, with organizational skills of Jubilee 2000 Coalition started by Archbishop George Carey
- As Fr. Sjaak was talking, I slowly began to realize that he was talking about me becoming a leader in what I had typically disdain: justice & Peace stuff
- All that unrealistic dreamily anarchistic stuff I heard from members of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and from those who worked in support of the Sandinistas

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- And all those unrealistic dreams that had no place in the realpolitik of American diplomacy and certainly nothing to do with the projection of force in the US Mil.
- As Fr. Sjaak talked about his times teaching at the University of Rio and working in the slums and how via creative nonviolence the clergy there were able to foil the generals running the country
- I recalled the words I had heard long ago from another Pope:
 - "It is not the Gospel that changes; it is we who begin to understand it better... The moment has arrived when we must recognize the signs of the times, seize the opportunity, and look far ahead." (Pope John Paul XXIII)
- 1999: So there I found myself organizing three busloads of students and parishioners to travel the Cologne to help form part of a human chain around that ancient city during the meeting of the G-8...At which meeting, the bulk of that debt was forgiven (with the odd exception of Haiti)
- Followed on: J&P projects involving the Intl Court at the Hague; Royal Dutch Shell, et alia;
 - Fr. Sjaak: "You're doing the work of a deacon...and I hope you will given this some consideration once you retire from the Air Force"
 - So here, and a few J&P projects later, am I.
- I mention this, because in the pragmatic world we live in (certainly in the military/ diplomatic/intelligence community), both Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and his parable of the Last Judgment are often seen as "unrealistic at best, and at worst, dreamily anarchistic."
 - At yet, recognizing the signs of the times and turning the hearts and minds of our church toward the unrealistic and anarchistic is exactly what we're expected to do as deacons.
 - We are charged to "interpret to the Church the needs, hopes and concerns of the world."
 - We are charged to interpret for our community and the world,
 - Why people are hungry, and thirsty and unclothed
 - Why refugees are in danger for their lives

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- Why do prisons care less about rehabilitation and reconciliation and more about being profit centers ?
- How can we, as churches united, better leverage our resources to provide something as simple (and as complex) as dental care for people in poverty?
- All these problems are complex;
 - And yet, as I think about it, all the projects I've been involved with, I've always been told: "We'll we looked at that, and it was just too big to solve."
 - Whether it was the homeless shelter we built for families with kids
 - Or whether it is in my current search for providing infant care for working moms, or building a community resource center or finding affordable housing for 30-somethings so they will not be obliged to move out of the town they grew up in.
- All these take a lot of talking, and networking and persuasion so that the church community and the wider community can understand that the needs, hopes and concerns of the world are those fundamental issues of social justice that Jesus talked about 2,000 years ago, and yes, we are obligated by our baptism to do something about it.
- That is your charge as deacons
 - And after you are ordained as priests and as you get involved in the day-to-day administrivia of running a parish, you'll find out that there is only so much one person can do...barely have enough time to take care of the pastoral concerns of your own congregation.
 - And often social justice issues are so complex that they fall by the wayside.
 - So when you're in charge one day of your own parish, I hope that the first thing on your agenda will be to ask yourself,
 - "Why don't we have at least two deacons in my church?"