

First Profession Homily

May 23, 2009

for Brandon Alana, SM and Ray Dominguez, SM

by Mike Lisbeth, SM

I have had an image running through my head as I prepared for today. And I'm sure it won't go away unless I share it with you. A few weeks ago, I stopped by the TV room in the novitiate. The viewers invited me to stay and watch the original "Star Wars" movie. As I focused on the two robots, R2-D2 and C3-PO with their two very different personalities, I couldn't help but recognize some similarity to Ray and Brandon. I know they have two very different personalities also, don't you think? I'll leave other aspects of this comparison to your own vivid and fertile imagination.

Two little words begin to capture the grand message and the spirit of this beautiful feast of the Ascension of Jesus. Those words are "power" and "mission." They are so very appropriate for our consideration today, as we celebrate the Marianist profession of first vows by Brandon and Ray. The power and the mission of Jesus are entrusted to us ALL through our baptism. By their profession today, Ray and Brandon enter even more deeply into this power and mission of Jesus Christ.

The entire life of Jesus demonstrates HIS power over sickness, evil, sin and death. Many times Jesus healed people whose bodies were broken. And he fed the hungry. And he forgave the sinner. And he even raised the dead. Jesus did not restrict his power to himSELF only, but shared it with his first disciples, and now with us. Today Brandon and Ray open themselves again to the power of Jesus' Spirit working with-in them.

Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians offers a beautiful description of the mighty power of Christ transforming the human person. Live in a manner worthy of your calling. In everyone, there is a seed of spirituality that needs to be nurtured in order to grow. For Paul, no alternative teacher equals the power of Christ to bring that growth to fullness.

The words of Jesus make evident that he HAS planted something in us, giving us a different vision, a different way of seeing, being and acting. He planted in us a Word that he received from the Father. It causes us to see things in another light, to evaluate ourselves and others by a gospel standard, a standard of love. Brandon and Ray have already begun to experience the power of Jesus, active and alive within their ministries.

Jesus reveals two concerns about sharing his power with his disciples. One is his concern about the rag-tag group of followers he leaves behind. (His concerns are well founded). The second thing is Jesus' gratitude to God that he HAS those followers (including you and me) who will continue to manifest his power. Jesus prays for his

first disciples - and Ray and Brandon - knowing they will face difficulties in ministry. He reminds them. and us, that we've been called and missioned.

We have been reflecting on the POWER of Jesus. By their profession of vows, Ray and Brandon also enter into the great MISSION of Jesus.

In our first reading today from Acts, the apostles had not yet fully grasped the purpose of Christ's ministry, namely, to prepare people for eternal salvation by dedicated lives. Their question about the re-establishment of a military kingdom in Israel indicates their confusion. Christ again explains that their mission is to be HIS witnesses to the whole world. The angels' reminder to "get moving" is as relevant for Brandon and Ray today as it was for those first disciples.

"Get on with it!" – This is advice that many of us give to others, or receive, when the job at hand appears to be getting less attention than it should. Today, we recall Christ's last appearance to his apostles, completing His public ministry. They are commissioned to "Go and Teach", but they are still standing around - stunned - when the angels appear and give them the command to "Get on with it"! On their profession day, we say to Ray and Brandon, "Get on with it"! — in Jesus' name!!

In today's gospel we hear Mark's account of the final meeting of Christ with his apostles. His last words of commission and encouragement are appropriate for Ray and Brandon too. I realize that, in their Novitiate formation, we have not yet completed the class on snake handling and poison drinking. But the mission Jesus gives is to be witnesses to his message, to "go into ALL the world and proclaim the good news to EVERYone".

As Jesus ascends, he shares with us the mission which the Father gave him, the salvation of the world. He asks us to be aware of the many people on the wide road that leads nowhere, and says to us, "What are YOU going to DO about it?" Jesus gives us the mission to proclaim to them, by our words, by our deeds, by our love, by our service, the Good News, the call to repentance, to new life in Jesus. This is the greatest mission we'll ever receive — a share in Jesus' own mission. He loved us enough and he trusted us so much that he placed his own mission into our hands. He died for those on that wide road, but he sends us to help them turn back, to get on the up-hill road that leads to life. Ray and Brandon, this is your mission as professed brothers with-in the Marianist Family.

On this solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, we pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our brothers Brandon and Ray. We imitate the action of the apostles. As soon as the Lord ascended, they went back to that Upper Room, gathered themselves around Mary, the first disciple, and prayed for the gift of the Spirit. Nine days later,

they WERE filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who previously were cowards and deserters now gave fearless witness to Jesus Christ.

But before the arrival of the Spirit, the community endured a unique, painful period of “in between” time. After the departure of Jesus at the Ascension, and before the arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost, the young church must have felt particularly alone and vulnerable. They could only pray from the emptiness of their own fragile faith. We ask Mary to teach US how to pray, how to use the power of God’s Spirit, how to embrace the mission of Jesus so that we too might respond courageously. If we do this, if we set our hearts set on eternal life with Jesus, we will be fearless. This is what gave our Marianist martyrs the strength to bear all the trials they suffered, because 1000 deaths were nothing compared with the joys that awaited them.

Brandon and Ray, my brothers, this is the power and the mission offered to you today within the charism of Blessed Chaminade. If you keep your eyes on that prize, and stay on that narrow road, you will be welcomed into the kingdom by Mary our Mother and eternally embraced by her son Jesus, in that eternal wedding banquet of which this Eucharist is a foretaste. Ray and Brandon, may God bless you with power and mission, with love and peace in your commitment to Marianist Life.

Calling Forth within the Eucharist:

By their years of prayer, study and discernment, Brandon and Ray have grown toward maturity in Marianist life from curiosity to commitment, witnessed by the Novitiate team and the Novitiate community. They have come to know the vitality and attraction of our Marianist charism. They have come to know Mary our Mother, and the formative power of her influence over their lives. They have come to recognize this as the right time to take the next step in their commitment to Marianist religious life. We affirm this decision.

Let the candidates who are called to make profession in the Society of Mary, please stand, and then come forward as I call your name.

Brandon K. Alana-Maugaotega

Rayler E. Dominguez

Words of Encouragement at the Reception:

Our holy founder, Blessed William Chaminade often wrote about faith. He used the expression “faith of the heart.” He wanted us to have a faith so deep that, like Mary’s, it could conceive and give birth to Jesus in this, our own time. Mary continues to form sons (and daughters) in faith in the image of Jesus. We gather to celebrate God’s work in the lives of Brandon and Ray.

It has been my joy to assist and to witness you, Ray and Brandon, growing in commitment to this beautiful Marianist faith of the heart. Our wounded world stands in need of the gifts you possess.

- You have grown from curiosity to conviction.
- You have experienced the formative value of communities of faith.
- You hear and respond to God’s missioning call to announce Good News. You are prepared to allow God’s power to work through them.

Ray and Brandon, welcome to our brotherhood. We promise you our continuing love and support. We challenge you to live this life to its fullness.