

*Sermon for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination*  
*Fr. Esteban Saucedo*  
*(Various Occasions 15, II)*  
*by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson*  
*Holy Nativity, Plano*  
*4 August, 2007*

I have been given a very difficult task. Fr. Esteban Saucedo has been a presbyter of the Church of God for fifty years. I have been a presbyter for only five. And yet I am to preach at this service in honor of him. When I began to prepare for this, I wasn't quite sure how to go about it.

The task is made more difficult by the fact that Padre Saucedo is probably embarrassed at this sort of attention. And he's probably wondering whether we have descended into idolatry by honoring him in this way. One of the dangers of charismatic leaders in the church is that people are sometimes tempted to worship the leader rather than God. And he certainly wouldn't want us to do that with him. You see, he knows as well as I do that we priests are nothing, in and of ourselves. It is only by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ that we are what we are. The church belongs to Christ, and we are merely servants in his name. And, if the truth were known, none of us are worthy of our office. Somehow, Jesus works through us. Not because we are so wonderful, but because he is.

And yet ... we all know (if we have tried at all) how difficult it is simply to allow God to work through us. Even if Jesus is the one who does the heavy lifting (and he is), when we follow him we share in his suffering, even as we receive the joy of salvation that he offers us. And so the church has always honored those who were faithful to the end, those who were examples to the rest of us, those through whom God has worked to reveal himself to us.

We honor those who have spent their lives working to build up Christ's body. Because by doing so we honor Christ himself. It is not because Esteban Saucedo is perfect that we honor him today. It is because Christ is perfect, and over fifty years, many of us have learned that from Esteban Saucedo.

St. Paul makes it clear, in his letter to the Ephesians, that not everyone is called to be a pastor or a teacher or an evangelist. But these vocations are given to the church in order to build it up. We are each members of Christ's body, and each of us has been given gifts. But those gifts are not for us, they are for the whole body. In order to serve Christ, we must use the gifts he has given us for the good

of his body. And as we do that, St. Paul says, we will grow up, we will grow together, we will be knit together in the love that Christ gives to us and to the entire world that he made. And we will know Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and we will be more and more like him.

That is the result when all the members of Christ's Body serve each other as Christ intends. It is the opposite of what Jesus saw in the crowds who came to him. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus "had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." We see here that Jesus brings order out of chaos and life out of death. He is the good shepherd, who oversees the building and growing of his own body. But he also says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." He intends for others to help in this task of bringing order and life to his people.

Fr. Saucedo, we know that Jesus himself is the shepherd and bishop of our souls. We thank you for your fifty years of laboring in the Lord's harvest as an elder. We thank you for fifty years of faithfully using all of the gifts at your disposal to win hearts and minds and lives to Jesus and his Body. And we honor Jesus Christ for working in you an example of faithfulness for us.