

Br. Thomas Carey's Sermon for the Ordination of Priests
Preached at St. John's Pro-Cathedral, Los Angeles, California
7 January 2012

(1 Peter 5:1-4; Psalm 67; Matthew 9:35-38)

*As I walk through / this wicked world / searchin' for life in the
darkness of insanity / I ask myself / is all hope lost / is there only pain
and hatred and misery? / And each time I feel like this inside / there's
one thing I wanna know / what's so funny 'bout peace love and
understanding?*

That's a song by Nick Lowe. It's about thirty years old, but the assertion still stands: There's nothing funny about peace, love and understanding. Nothing at all.

I knew a woman once named Joan, and during my first year at St. Patrick's, Joan was all over me... "Why don't you do it this way?" "How come you haven't called so and so?" I didn't like her. I thought she was difficult, and I was right!

So, Joan was diagnosed with liver cancer, and when the chemotherapy made it too hard for her to come to church, I would go to her. To be honest I did it not because I wanted to, but because I didn't want one of those phone calls. Every Sunday I brought that week's bulletin and the sacrament. We'd read the lessons and

pray, and I'd feed her, and then I'd be off. This went on for six months or so, and naturally, things between us changed. But the news got worse and finally Joan went into Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan and it was clear she wasn't getting out. So I drove in to see her on a bright October day. There were Leon, her husband, and all her sons, and they were all handling it— 'vigiling' is what they call it. I went into the other room where Joan was. She was lying on her side, I think. I sat next to the bed and her eyes opened. She looked at me and said "I love you!"

She was dying, and she looked at me and said "I love you."

My sisters and brothers, there are places in the world – at an altar, at a graveside, places near pitchers of carefully warmed water and stone basins into which they can be poured, places next to a bed – places that are marked "Priest". It is our honor, and our joy, our task and our vocation, to take on whatever our people bring to those places—joy, sorrow, rage, whatever they bring—we take it on. This is our imperfect gift, to take it on and give back peace, love and understanding. And sometimes what we get, what I got, is Jesus himself, saying "I love you."

There are two boys who are members of my parish, Roberto and Alexis. Roberto is eight and played Juan Diego on Guadalupe

Day, and Alexis is six. Alexis is like the Holy Spirit: everywhere you look, he's there. I love these two boys, and the other day, as we shared the Peace, in a flash of love and understanding I saw who I am for them: I'm the big white man, who dresses in golden robes and makes big gestures with a loud voice, sings long songs that sound like stories and gives them, every Sunday, little pieces of bread, which they dip in a golden cup filled with wine. What an honor to be that for them; and I'll be that man forever for them—that's something to live for.

“The Harvest is Plentiful , the laborers are few...” My beautiful brothers and sisters: Pat, Kerri, Matt, Fenny, Mary, Liz, David, James, Heather, Jeff. You are the harvest; you are the plentiful harvest—the fruit of all the labor of mothers and fathers, and partners and husbands and wives, professors and deans and bishops, and Commissions. And even though that sounds like a lot, given the size of the mission field, those laborers are few.

I've just spent two days with you. You're a wonderful harvest. You're also the laborers. And given the size of this mission field—this huge, huge city; this magnificent but ailing country, this jewel, this forgotten paradise of a world, you are so, so few.

*And as I walked on / Through troubled times / My spirit gets so
downhearted sometimes / So where are the strong / and who are the
trusted? / And where is the harmony, sweet harmony? / And each
time I feel it slippin' away / just makes me wanna cry / What's so
funny...*

You are the strong. You are the trusted. You bring the sweet
harmony. You are strong. So long as you realize and remember:
It ain't you. It isn't you. It's them. The people. All of them.
That's where Jesus lives. In them. And they're going to show you
what you need to do.

I've been at the Church of the Epiphany for almost a year and a
half. We've done some really important things. But within that
community itself, I spun my wheels in a ditch I dug because I
thought I was the point. I'm not. You're not. We're not. It's
them, the Body.

Jesus looked out on the crowd and had compassion because they
were like sheep without a shepherd. It's them, but it's also you.
You are the shepherd. St John says the shepherd lays down his life
for the sheep, and by so doing—doing it every day—you become
part the flock. You are part of the Body and therefore no less a
partaker of that Holy Wisdom which is God, filling your mind,

guiding your spirit, feeding you your words and actions. Do not neglect your prophetic responsibility; tell us where, how, when we go wrong. Bring us understanding, and peace, and love.

My brothers and sisters this is a long road on which you embark. We walk it with you. That's our vow. This is a road that begins with the Lord Jesus and takes us to Mary Magdalene and the first apostles, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy; to the Desert Mothers and Fathers; to Benedict, Francis, Ignatius, Cranmer, William White, Samuel Seabury, James DeKoven, The Philadelphia Eleven, Barbara Harris, Gene Robinson; to right here, right now. It takes us to rooms, large and small, where we gather and stand at those places marked "Priest" and we tell the story: How betrayal, torture and death; divinity, humanity, scandal and paradox brought, and bring, peace love and understanding. This is so important what we're doing, but it isn't us. It's Jesus; it's the Holy Spirit; it's the Master of the Universe. So my dear Brother and Sisters, my dear Bishops, with your permission, let us continue again the great work. Amen.