

## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### **Homily given at the Mass celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood of Abbot Luke Rigby, O.S.B., on July 23, 2000**

On July 23, 1950, five monks of Ampleforth Abbey were ordained to the priesthood. Three of them have already been called to the Lord. The fourth is a monk and priest of Ampleforth. The fifth is Abbot Luke Rigby. Today, then, is the fiftieth anniversary of ordination of Abbot Luke. Our main celebration of this event will be on Sunday, October 8, when Abbot Luke's confrère from the 1950 ordination class will join him here in Saint Louis, together with the Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation, and we will have a Jubilee Mass and celebration to which all of you, and all the members of the Abbey Family, will be invited. Nevertheless, it would be highly unfitting that this day, the actual anniversary day, should pass unnoticed, and so Abbot Luke is presiding at this Mass, and I will say a few words.

Today, then, we give thanks to almighty God for his gift to us of a priest, a priest whom he has, in his great mercy -- to the priest and to us -- kept faithful for these fifty years, and whom he has given to us, to be with us, to be in the center of our Abbey and its Family, for these forty-five years since its first beginning. Who is the true priest? The prophet Jeremiah, the Psalmist David, the Apostle Paul, the evangelist Mark, tell us in the readings for today's Mass who the true priest is.

#### ***Jeremiah:***

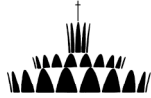
He is the one who gathers, rather than scatters.  
He is the one who brings back, rather than drives away.  
He is the one who ministers to our fears, to our tremblings.  
He is the one who cares.  
He is our shepherd.

#### ***David:***

The true priest: He is the one who leads us beside the restful waters.  
He is the one who restores our soul.  
He is the one who, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, with his rod and his staff, comforts us.  
He is the one who lays the table for us, he is the one who anoints our head with oil, so that our cup runs over.  
He is the one who passes on to us the promise: Surely goodness and kindness shall follow you all the days of your life, and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

#### ***The Apostle Paul:***

Now we come to the heart of the mystery of the true priest. For, at the root of all our sufferings as human beings, there as the source of them all, is sin -- is enmity, somehow, darkly, at the depths of our very being, but also, tragically,



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



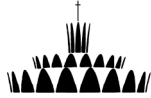
horribly, there in our own personal will -- enmity against God, enmity against our fellow human beings, enmity against ourselves. And the true priest takes it all upon himself, takes it into his own very flesh, pours out his life blood because of it, and so puts that enmity to death, and brings us, who are so infinitely unworthy, peace.

### ***Now, the evangelist:***

Who is the true priest? The evangelist has no description. But he shows us someone. Someone veiled in mystery, Someone whom we can see, as it were, only in the reactions of the people who have discovered Him. And we see them pressing about him, in ever greater and greater numbers, pressing about him, longing, asking, begging -- pressing about him, so that there is no longer even any time to eat; following him, going after him, pursuing him, pursuing him to the distant, to the deserted place, running, running to get there -- and now a huge, a vast crowd, waiting for him, waiting for him, waiting. Then the little boat comes ashore. We are told only that, when He came to them, they knew that they had found *compassion*. They had found the True Priest.

Dear friends, this True Priest, we know, is wholly alive, wholly present to us, always ministering to us, in his church. He is always present and ministering to us, in every age and in every place, in so many ways, but in a unique sacramental way in the person of those unworthy human beings whom he has called, in a great mystery, to share, through the Sacrament of Orders, in his priesthood, and so as it were to minister his priesthood to us. Whatever their faults, whatever their weaknesses, whatever their sins, yet the True Priest is truly and fully present to us in them, through the mystery of the Sacrament of Orders which they have received. Through them, we touch the True Priest, without them, we could not; through them, the True Priest speaks his word to us, ministers his sacraments to us, gives his forgiveness to us, whispers in our ear as, dying, we set out on our last journey; without them, we journey, in this life and the next, alone. What a blessing for us, then, dear friends, is the ordained priest, what a necessity, what a gift. For every priest, we must give the most profound thanks to the Lord.

Today, we give thanks for five priests, all sons of Saint Benedict, all monks, or at least at first monks, of Ampleforth Abbey, our mother house, all ordained to the sacred priesthood on this day fifty years ago. Three of them have now gone on before us Father Kentigern Devlin, called to the Lord in 1982; Father Julian Rochford, called to the Lord in 1993; Cardinal Basil Hume, called to the Lord in 1999, having been given a very special ministry in the church. Then, there is Father Edmund Hatton, monk of Ampleforth, priest in Osmotherly in England, whom you will have the pleasure of meeting, and the joy of beginning to know, on October 8, when the entire Abbey Family gathers to celebrate what we at this Mass are celebrating this morning.



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



There is one other. What shall we say of him? Dear friends, sometimes, sometimes very occasionally, sometimes very rarely, there is given to us a priest who expresses through his very self, in his way of living and acting and being among us, what every priest possesses sacramentally through Orders. In such a priest, we not only encounter the True Priest sacramentally, through faith, but we almost see the True Priest, almost in his very reality. Such a priest, such a man, is one in a million. Dear friends, is it not true that we have known such a priest? Has he not been here ministering among us for what is now forty-five years, since the very beginning of this monastery? Has he not been at the heart of this monastery, and at the heart of that community of now thousands of people who make up its Family, for all these years? Are we not celebrating today the Lord's gift of fifty years of fidelity to him, and of faithful and loving presence to us through him? Is he not presiding at this Eucharist we are celebrating this morning? We ask: what kind of thanksgiving, what degree and quality of thanksgiving, do we owe to God for such a gift? We ask: what special responsibilities, for witnessing to the Christian faith, for the church, do we have, we monks and all we members of the Abbey Family -- what special responsibilities do we have, having been given the privilege of knowing and being ministered to by such a priest?

**Abbot Luke Rigby, O.S.B.**

