

***St. Mary's Church  
Denver, Colorado***

***“Take thou the Holy Ghost”***

*An Homily by the Rt. Rev'd D. Presley Hutchens*

*On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ordination of Canon Phillip Nevels*

*And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

I am most honored to share this time with Canon Phillip Nevels and Mary, who I know has been a source of strength, love, and faithfulness. I am honored to gather with each of you to say thank you, to share affection and to affirm one of the most meaningful relationships we are privileged to have in life, that of a godly and faithful priest and his parishioner.

Most of us are probably well aware that Canon and Mrs. Nevels have been faithful and godly servants in the Anglican Catholic Church from its meager beginnings. They have witnessed all that has transpired in these past thirty years. Thankfully, they have devoted their lives to the people of St. Mary's Church. They have been like a rock in the good times and bad. They have been a safe haven for those who have been hurt, disappointed or simply needing an anchor in their life. For half a century, Canon Nevels has been priest, confessor, trusted advisor and, at the same time, friend to all that have crossed his path as has Mary. There are few like them in this Church or any other. I am humbled as I look at his life and the beauty of their marriage. Would that all of us could be as they are. It has not always been easy, nor has the witness of their life been an accident. Only the most devoted to Our Lord, can bear a witness like they have over the course of these many years of service.

Personally, they, more especially he, has been someone who I have been able to seek out for counsel and guidance. His experience is an invaluable resource to me as well as so many others we will never know about. I admire them.

This scripture lesson today is most appropriate. It is a reflection of the accounts of Jesus' visitation to the disciples following his resurrection.

Reading from the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of John beginning at the nineteenth verse: They the same day a evening, being the first day of the week when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.

In the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer is found in the Ordering of Priests these words said as the Bishop and Presbyters lay their hands on the head of him who is to be ordained.

*Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.*

Then as the Bishop delivers a Bible into the hand of him who is to be ordained, he says:

*Take thou the authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments in the Congregation where thou shalt be lawfully appointed there unto.*

We have no clearer picture of the apostolic succession than this. In each generation since Jesus' resurrected appearance to the frightened disciples locked behind closed doors, the aforementioned power of the Holy Ghost is passed by the hands of the next generation of apostles to Deacons, Priests and Bishops to serve the future generations of the redeemed faithful in Christ.

It is at this very point that Catholics and non-Catholics differ dramatically. Catholics understand the very mystical nature of this transaction. They understand it as the divine order through which Christ's body on earth goes about its work in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

For those in Holy Orders, this understanding of godly submission in humility to the unbroken succession of apostolic authority begins when one is ordained to the Holy Order of Deacon. A question asked of every Deacon by a Bishop in the Catholic Church during the Ordering of Deacons is "Will you reverently obey your Bishop, and other chief Ministers, who, according to the Canons of the Church, may have charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions?"

Non-Catholics make no such vows and generally do not understand their spiritual relationship to Our Lord in this way.

Interestingly, in some divine sense, ordination stems from the resurrected Christ beginning with his very first visit with his disciples following all that has happened beginning with his visit to Jerusalem for Passover and his death, burial and resurrection. He breathes the Holy Spirit into them.

As I mentioned to many of you on Maundy Thursday, this is the same spirit of God, the Nephesh or Hebrew word, in which God breathed new life into this lifeless creation. It is the breath of life from God's very own nostrils.

Canon Nevels has been a faithful and spotless vessel in which the collection of the gifts of the Holy Ghost have resided and been a very real source of spiritual health and wholeness.

Whatever words we may say here today, can never convey the genuine love and respect we feel for both of them other than to say, you two changed the lives of so many in the most godly way. The world is a better place because of your presence. I wish for you both another fifty years of devoted and joyous service and pray God's richest blessing upon you both.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.