

**Fr. Sean Koehr Ordination Reception**  
**Jim Koehr Talk**  
**June 8, 2019**

- **Introduction**
  - **Colleen, our boy is a Catholic Priest!**
    - Sean, I am **bursting with so much pride** I am going to have to go to **confession**
      - I'm not going to you though!
    - I feel like a **“made” man** in the **Catholic mafia**
    - **And you Colleen – you are going straight to heaven!**
  - **If you are in this tent**, it is because **you played some role** in Sean's vocation.
    - Colleen and I are so pleased to have you **share our joy** tonight
    - When I'm done speaking, in about an hour or so, you'll be meeting some of the most impactful
  - Please allow me to introduce a few right now
    - First, **Sean's Grandparents**
      - What a blessing to have them here to witness this.
        - Sean, how many people your age could have **all four grandparents** attend an event like this?
      - Or better yet, how many these days can say they **have grandparents** that have **demonstrated** such an **extreme level of fidelity**?
        - Both sets of grandparents are **well beyond their 50th** wedding anniversaries.
          - Grandma and Grandpa **Koehr** (RADM Jim and Erma) are just about to hit their **57<sup>th</sup>** in July
          - Grandma and Grandpa **Carey** (Jack and Beth) are just about to hit their **60<sup>th</sup>** in June
      - I'm quite sure their **loving example** of Christian marriage has **led to the strong extended family** of which you are a part.
        - And I'm **equally sure** that **example of family** played a **role in your vocation**
    - Here's a **special shout out** to my **mother**
      - **Look around Mom.**
      - You've come a long way from an **orphaned youngest daughter** of **Italian immigrants** in a **company coal mining town**
      - To paraphrase a line from the most recent play at Seton School
        - **You're not in Iowa anymore!**

- **Bishop Burbidge and Fr. Searby**
  - We are so pleased to have **so many priests and seminarians** here to share our joy
    - But **two** I'd like to **especially welcome**
      - When Bishop Burbidge's **feet hit the floor each morning Satan says to himself,**
        - **"Oh crap! He's awake!"**
        - (I'd love to take credit for that one, but I **totally stole it** from **Josiah Bookwalter** – thanks Chewy!)
      - **Bishop Burbidge**, we are so blessed to **have you** in our diocese and at our home
        - You are **exactly the leader Christ's Church** in Arlington needs right now
      - And **as Sean's father**, I could not be more pleased to see him **enter his vocation under your guidance** and leadership
    - And, of course, **Fr. Searby**
      - Sometimes I feel like **we've already had our own family priest** for many years now.
        - You are **exhibit A1** that **joy is the key to evangelization**
      - I'm **not sure if even I have fully absorbed** the entirety of the **impact** you've had **on our family**
        - Sean for sure
        - But all the **confessions in the Man Room, trips abroad** and **family dinners** in which you participated have not gone unnoticed
        - And who knows, your **joyful example** and those sorts of **gestures, small and large**, may lead to **another vocation** from our family
          - I can see already that it is **leading to strong marriages.**
        - I simply cannot express in words my gratitude for having you in our lives

- **Colleen**
  - And finally, **Sean’s mother, Colleen**
    - For those of you here with lots of kids, you’ve heard some variation on
      - 12 kids! **All from one woman?**
      - I just love telling people, “yeah, **all from my first wife**”
  - I’m sure Colleen and her wisdom was a **big part of Sean’s vocation**.
    - Colleen intuitively understood that we are all **born entirely selfish** and that **children just don’t grow out of that** on their own.
      - As infants, **we cry to get what we want**
        - **Some of us still do.**
        - It’s the manifestation of original sin I suppose
      - Even as a young mother Colleen somehow knew that **kids didn’t automatically grow out of that**.
        - She used to **refer to the process** of getting a kid out of that mindset as “**breaking them**”
          - She meant **like a horse**.
        - If kids are like horses, Sean was the **toughest of untamed broncos** for her
        - In fact, Sean’s been **causing Colleen problems** since the day he was born
          - at **10 lbs. 13 oz.**
          - I see a lot of women cringing in pain right now
    - I remember **early** in Sean’s **time at the Seminary**
      - He was **sent back to his home Parish** to speak about his calling.
      - His **first Mass** was Saturday night
        - **We weren’t there**, because, as those of you who know us already know
          - **Colleen goes to 9:00 a.m. Mass** no matter what happened on Saturday night.
        - That evening, before Sean got home, **Colleen’s phone** was beeping and binging and ringing with her **friends messaging and calling**
          - “What a great young man Sean is!”
          - “**How did you do it** Colleen?”
      - A little later, Sean got home

- From the look on his face, he was clearly pleased with how his first talk went
- And then he saw his mother
  - **“Sean, you need to tell those women the truth!”**
  - **“You were a pain in my ass!”**
- Sean **has received a lot of such guidance** from Colleen in his life
  - And now **I’m going to take a crack** at it

- **Expectations for Fr. Sean as a Priest**
  - **I don't have**
    - Experience in **Mrs. Carroll's** Senior Religion class, or
    - a **four-year degree in philosophy** from Notre Dame
    - and I don't have **seven years** of in-depth education and formation in the **seminary**, but
      - I have been able to **answer some of the deeper theological questions** from my children
        - Like, "**Are the charioteers the girl chariots?**"
    - But a **lack of formal theological training** is **not gonna stop me** from giving my thoughts on what I think **you need to do to be a great priest**
  - **My goal** is to describe **your Father's expectations** of you as a priest
    - For you **younger ladies** out there, **especially** those with initials like **CMK or SCC**, I hope you are **paying attention**
      - What I'm about to describe **won't be all that different** from the **expectations that you should have** for any man in your future
  - Sean, one **caveat** before I begin though
    - You've been playing sports at a fairly high level all your life
      - And I've always told you that if **I ever** give you guidance that **contradicts your coach, go with what the coach says**
        - Which is probably why **I just became your coach**
      - But that applies here too
    - While I'm confident that **I may phrase some of this differently** than your new coach, Bishop Burbidge,
      - I **doubt** I'm going to say anything that **Bishop Burbidge will disagree with,**
      - but **knowing you – and your mother** - if I do, **I'm sure I'll hear about** it before I get my next beer

- **#1 Be Holy**
  - You once told me that to be a Priest, you need to want “more”
  - Remember what “more” is
    - It is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ
  - I’m not going to pretend I fully understand that on the level that you’d better, but I do understand these three things:
    - **First**, I know that Christ said, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”**
      - He’s called you to have a deeply personal relationship with him
        - If your motivation comes from a source other than that, you will be secretly motivated by a variety of other possible motivations
          - None of them good for your vocation
    - **Second**, I know that any deeply **personal relationship takes effort**.
      - In this case it means an unwavering **dedication to prayer**
        - I’ve noticed in my life, if I ever wanted to make sure that **I did something that was important to me**, I’d do it very **first thing in the morning** before my day got hectic
          - That was true back when I used to **train for triathlons**
          - It was true when we were doing that **Exodus 90 exercise** together recently
          - And I’m quite sure it is **true for a person as busy** as a dedicated priest
        - **Block the first hour of you day in peace** to work on your relationship with Jesus.
          - If you have the **6:30 a.m. Mass**, that may mean **getting up at 5:00 a.m.**,
            - but that is **later you got up for swim practice**.
          - I’d expect that to “bear much fruit”
    - And **third**, I know that being a priest is a **very demanding job**
      - If you **lose** track of **the “more”** and allow it all **to become vanity**, all you’ll be left with is
        - A very **demanding** and **lonely job**
        - That requires you to **work weekends**
        - For the **world’s largest bureaucracy**

- And **really crappy pay**
  - That **sounds like “less”** not “more” to me
- I can't say I know this for sure, but
  - I'd bet that any **priest who has lost his zeal** for the priesthood
    - **first lost** his intimacy with **Jesus Christ**
  - And that **left him without the “more”** you were telling me about
- **Be Holy – that is your Father's expectation**

- **#2 Be a Man**
  - You need to be a **real man**, because **this is who God made you**.
    - We have **men as Catholic Priests for a reason**
      - Because **Jesus picked men**
    - I've had people try to tell me that **Jesus chose all men** as his disciples **because he was succumbing to the social norms** of the day
      - He was God!
      - He **violated nearly every social norm of his day** without hesitation
        - Jesus was **so politically incorrect** that he literally **risked his life every day** of his public ministry
    - I **don't believe** for a minute **he picked Men** for any other reason than **the way God made men**
  - You once gave me a book called **"Wild at Heart"** by John Eldredge
    - It talked about how to raise boys.
    - The **basic thesis** of the book was that there are **three desires** that make **boys and men unique** in the world.
      - A **man's heart** has a **desperate desire** for:
        - **A Battle to Fight**
        - **An Adventure to Live**
        - **A Beauty to Rescue**
    - **The Battle**
      - You certainly have a battle on your hands.
        - **Satan is all around us - even inside our own church.**
          - **The guy's good**, we must admit.
          - **You are going to have to be better**
      - As a child of 911, you've always heard **"See something, Say something"**.
        - That's not going to be you.
        - If you see something, **DO something**
      - **The Church**, and the world for that matter, **doesn't need any more "nice boys"**
        - That is **pitifully insufficient**
        - It needs **strong men** who can **occasionally kick some ass with the money changers in the Temple**

- **The Adventure**
  - Adventure requires something of us
    - It puts us to the test
  - Think about the **recipe for the perfect boy's game** when you were a kid:
    - Start with any **challenging activity**
    - Stir in some **exploration**
    - Throw in a heavy dose of **danger**
    - And mix it all together with your brothers and friends
    - Voila! **The perfect boy's.....adventure**
  - **Challenge, Exploration, and Danger – with people you love**
    - **Sounds a lot like** the recipe for the adventure on which you **embarked this morning.**
  - **Christ** had **1,000 days** and hopefully you will have **20 times** that.
    - I've **always had high expectations** for you,
      - but **even I don't expect** you to **live the adventure** with the **gusto and impact** that Christ did.
        - But **he's your model**
  - Treat your **time following Christ** like the greatest adventure possible.
    - Treat this adventure with a **sense of wonder in how the Holy Spirit works** in the world
    - And relish the **opportunities to step forward** into the **most challenging and dangerous situations.**
- **The Beauty**
  - There is definitely a **beauty that needs to be rescued.**
    - **Christ's Church.**
      - Predators surround Her
      - Men must be Her protectors
        - **Real men stand up to evil and injustice on behalf of those who cannot**
  - I **don't think it is a coincidence** that we refer to the **Church in the feminine.**
    - **Men are Her protectors.**

- So, **your vocation** is the perfect role to **fulfill your purpose** as the **Man that God made you.**
- I know you like **CS Lewis**
  - About **80 years ago**, he said: “**We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful**”
    - His words are even more true today.
  - **You are no gelding**
    - You are a **great black stallion!**
    - You **even wear black**
      - Coincidence? I think not!
- And if you ever want to **celebrate your manhood** with a **bourbon** and a **50-ring cigar**, I know just the guy to do it with
  - **Please don't forget to come home** every once in a while
- **Be a Man – that is your Father's expectation**

- **#3 Be Faithful**
  - I never understood the concept of a catholic priest who didn't fully accept the teachings and teaching authority of the Church.
    - How could a man **commit his whole being** in the service of the Church and **not go all-in** on the Church's **teaching and tradition**?
    - I say it like it will be easy, but I know it won't be
  - You were **committing your whole being** to the Church **founded by Christ Himself**,
    - the most **impactful non-governmental organization in the history of the world**
    - It is **quite true** that, over the course of history, the Catholic Church has been **led by some men** who have **behaved quite badly**.
      - Or even some who were **outright evil**
      - I know you **learned a lot** about some of those men in your **religion classes at Seton** with Mrs. Carroll.
    - But always remember **Christ's Church is bigger than the men who lead Christ's Church.**
  - Sean, you are now the **most liberally educated member** of our extended family, by far
    - And you are also now a **caretaker of 2,000 years of Church Tradition**
      - **Without Tradition, the Truth**, along with the magisterium of **the Church, is left to the whim of flawed men**
    - **Never allow yourself to fall into the trap** I see so many **highly educated people** fall into
      - Never allow yourself to become **so arrogant** that you **substitute your judgment** of the Truth for **the tradition and magisterium of the Catholic Church**
        - Or even for the dictates of readily observable Natural Law
  - But for heaven's sake, be willing to **meet people where they are**.
    - I remember being **castigated in the confessional** once for not knowing the **exact words to the Act of Contrition**.
      - Personally, I think God was happy I was there.
    - It's **not always about the dance steps**, it's **about the dance**.
      - I realize that ritual is an important part of our Church, so the dance steps do play an important role.

- Like a lot of your future parishioners, **I'd love to do it exactly right.**
- So, wouldn't it just have been better for that priest to put a printed copy of the Act of Contrition up in the box for people like me?
- Or even better
  - Is there some rule that says you have to give
    - **2 Hail Marys** for **yelling at your kids**,
    - **5 Hail Marys** for **killing someone**, and
    - **6 Hail Marys** for driving slow in the fast lane?
  - How about if you said something like this:
    - Jim, you've had 9 kids graduate from Seton and three more on their way.
    - Don't you think it might be a **little embarrassing** if it ever came out at an event **attended by a large number of Seton people** that you **don't know** the exact words to the **Act of Contrition**?
      - But hey, your **secret's safe** with me
    - For your penance,
      - **go memorize** the act of contrition, and
      - **say it three times** without looking
- Fr. Scalia calls that "Truth with Charity"
  - I like that
- **Be Faithful – that is your Father's expectation**

- **#4 Be Joyful**
  - From **Fr. Searby's** living **example**, you know personally how **attractive** real joy can be.
  - We have **far too many dour Catholics** in this world
    - Think about what we believe.
    - It's incredible I know, but We believe that
      - God sent his only son
      - to die for us
      - to open the gates of heaven and
      - that even our suffering his redemptive
  - If we **actually believed** everything that we say we believe, **how could we be unhappy?**
    - That's **impossible for most of us humans**, of course.
    - But the **key thing to remember**
      - **a dour Catholic does more harm to the work of evangelization than an outright unfaithful one.**
      - At least the unfaithful don't confuse people by pretending that our Faith is something special
  - Let me give you two (2) pieces of practical advice about being joyful:
    - **First**, I hope you realize that **your smile is one of your most potent weapons**
      - **And I mean your particular smile**
      - **When you smile** at someone, you are telling them that **they bring joy into your life**
        - And that will **open them up** to you
      - This applies in group settings to
        - There are certainly **times to be serious** as a Priest,
        - but some of the most **effective homilies** I've heard were **given with a broad smile.**
    - **Second, with the demands** you are undertaking, you will **inevitably** find yourself **feeling dour**
      - Whenever **I get overwhelmed** and **start flipping out** in the kitchen, I find it **helpful** when I remember to think of **Michigan Football**
        - Yes, I know that, as **Notre Dame** graduates, **neither** of us **normally find much joy** in Michigan football
        - But I **love their coach**, a strong **Catholic man, Jim Harbaugh**
        - Coach Harbaugh is **famous for asking** his team,

- **“Whose got it better than us?”**
  - To which they all answer, **“Nobody!”**
- I **don’t know** what the great **philosophers** say about **joy**, but I’ve always found that **the key to true joy is gratitude**
  - It is one of the reasons I find myself so joyful tonight
- On joy, I think you might be able to **take a lesson** from your brother **Patrick**.
  - **If I were a Catholic priest** and **fully believed** that I was about to **change bread and wine** into the **real body** and blood of **Christ**, I think I would
    - stand in the back of the church before every mass,
    - look up to heaven, and
    - say **“This is literally going to be the best mass ever!”**
- **Be Joyful – that is your Father’s expectation**

- **#5 Be Excellent**
  - **Fr. Searby** has also proven over and over again, **excellence is very attractive**
    - It always pleased me to know that you had so much guidance and direction from **Opus Dei** during your years at Notre Dame
      - From that, you learned that **everything you do** in your daily life, no matter how mundane, should be **done for the glory of God.**
    - **In other words,**
      - **Excellence is not merely compatible with Catholicism**
      - **Excellence is required by Catholicism**
    - Which means that everything you do should be absolutely the best you can do
  - That should start with **the way you will encounter the most people** in your ministry
    - **With your Homilies**
  - We've **talked about this before** and you have made it your own already, but here is **Dad's 30 second Homiletics class**
    - **Hook me** in the first 10 seconds so, as you once said, I don't zone out until the Creed
    - **Tell me a story**
    - **Explain the story** for those of us who are slow, and
    - **End with a twist** on the same hook you started with
    - **Spice it up** with
      - A little **humor**
      - the occasional **self-deprecating remark**, and
      - Some of those **impressions** that you are so good at
        - I hope I'm at Mass with you if there is ever a time when you find **Monty Python** useful to make your point!
    - That is **one formula** for a great **8 to 10-minute homily**
      - It's not all that different from the formula that makes for a **great Country music song**
    - You are **already among the best I've heard** at this
      - Your **call to holiness** with your homily that used **Ben Hur's "Row Well and Live"**
      - Or your **call to the cross** with **Earnest Shackleton's advertisement for crew members** on his expedition to Antarctica
      - Those were **really good, truly**

- The key point here is the power of stories
  - It's why Jesus **spoke in parables**
    - It's why we have **Saints** and **stained-glass windows**
  - There's a never-ending supply of stories for you to use
    - Not just from Church history, but from secular history as well.
    - But if you need to make a little bit of it up, feel free
      - I don't think God would mind
- **Excellence should** extend beyond the homily **into everything you do**
  - The energy you put into confession
  - The love you show the grieving Family
  - The patience you show to a mother struggling with her children or her marriage
  - It should even extend to the more mundane things you do
    - Like how you run a meeting.
      - There's no requirement for a church meeting to go from 7:30 to 9:00, independent of content
    - Or the way you dress.
      - Make sure your shoes are shined and your shirt pressed
        - Color coordination shouldn't be a problem
- **Be Excellent – that is your Father's expectation**

- **Finally, #6 Be a Leader**
  - Sean, I'm sure you remember **Mom's Grandfather, Pops**
    - For the rest of you, Pops was a **wonderful old Irishman** who proved that the **fountain of youth flows with Schmitz beer and vodka**
  - Pops used to say, "**Hard work ain't easy**"
    - I **never** actually **agreed with that**.
      - **Hard work should be easy** for you Sean
        - Especially now that you're on a mission from God.
    - No, **Hard Work is the easy part**
      - **What's hard is being responsible**
  - To be a **great priest**, you have to be a **great leader**
    - When you **pray** for God to **send someone** to make something better
      - Remember to **be open** to the idea that **he's sending you**
    - You've been a leader your whole life
      - You know what it takes
    - But let me remind of **four key principles of leadership** that, if properly applied, will **get people to follow** you anywhere
      - **Including to Christ**
    - They work **independently of the situation**. It could be
      - A **business**,
      - A **school**,
      - A **club**,
      - A **family**,
      - Even a **high school swimming team**
    - And I'm quite sure **they will work particularly well** in the context of the **Catholic Church**
  - **People will follow** you anywhere
    - If they know that you **love them**,
    - If they feel like they are **personally getting better**
    - If they feel a **part of something bigger** than themselves, and
    - If they feel like they are **winning**
  - I doubt you will find it difficult to see how those four key leadership principles can be applied to your ministry as a priest
    - Three (3) of the Four (4) should be pretty straightforward
      - Your parishioners should definitely **know that you love them**
      - You should be striving to **make all of them better people**

- And it is difficult to imagine that someone would have trouble seeing the Church as **bigger than then themselves**
- The challenge in today's world is going to be helping the faithful feel like the Church is winning
  - In my own mind, the Church took a huge step toward that this morning
    - The quality of the men I saw ordained this morning gives me great confidence in the future
    - Now **you just have to lead**
  - **No pressure Fr. Isenberg**, but the **key to winning** here is a **continued stream of priestly vocations** from
    - **holy,**
    - **strong,**
    - **joyful and**
    - **talented men like the ones in the pipeline today.**
- **Be a Leader – that is your Father's expectation**

- **Conclusion**
  - I've spoken far too long here, so let me **conclude** this **very personal message to you my son**:
    - Be **Holy**
    - Be a **Man**
    - Be **Faithful**
    - Be **Joyful**
    - Be **Excellent**
    - Be a **Leader**
  - Those **your Father's expectations**
    - **And they are my expectations too**
  - At the **risk of being hyperbolic, a risk I will gladly take** because this is what I believe
    - There are countless stories throughout history of
      - the **right man** at
      - the **right time** in
      - the **right place** for
      - the **right mission**.
  - **Call me prideful Sean, but I think you are that man**
  - **I love you**
    - **Now go do something great!**