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On the Occasion of the Ordination of Toni Dipina

February 8, 2009

Let Us Ordain the Radical

We have ordained you. This is a service where we bless, consecrate and sanctify one of us to lead us, and where we each rededicate ourselves to our own calling.

When we look at the root of the word ordain, we see the Latin word for order. Ordinance and ordinary share the same Latin root. When we think of ordinance, we think of customs, laws, and a command. In Christian tradition the Eucharist, the sacrament of bread and wine eaten in remembrance of the life and teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, the symbols of God's provision of sustenance and joy for creation, is an ordinance. The ordinance is a kind of divine order, both a command and a sequence. Traditions both maintain and change. The ordinances and those we ordain keep the tradition steady, solid, unmovable, unwavering. At the same time, the ordinances and those we ordain allow the tradition to change. It allows a living, flowing, growing, moving tradition that brings us ever closer to the Divine will. In both of these aspects, an ordination ought to be a radical thing.

It is radical in the sense of radical that is foundational and extreme. Many of us shrink from the word "radical." In our current public discourse, we associate the word radical with violence. However, that which is radical is basic, from the root or source of a thing. All too often, the structures and institutions that we build to preserve an idea or a set of teachings do not actually preserve the teachings, but rather begin to exist in and for themselves. All too often, the church seeks to preserve itself within the political economy of the status quo and loses the force of its basic teaching. Thus, the church needs its radicals to keep it true to its roots, to keep it connected to its source.

This service of worship and celebration is an occasion where we say to you: "We trust you." We trust you to keep the tradition stable and solid when that is appropriate. And, we trust you to take us to the unknown, unforeseen and dangerous places of radical change when Holy Spirit calls us there. We trust you to teach us the basics of what it means to be a Christian: radical faith, justice, truth, peace and love. We trust you to help us find the courage to return to the source of our being. Such is a radical move. We trust you to help us live these principles in our ordinary lives, to make the ordinary holy.

We trust you to help us see God's splendor in a sparkling tear, and to hear God's voice in the laughter of children at play. We trust you to show us how the tradition, the church, our own radical living ought to point us beyond the go along to get along, don't rock the boat, yes ma'am, yes sir bourgeois, I got mine, you got yours to get, conformity. We trust you to show us a more wondrous way.

And so, Toni, my sisters and my brothers, let us ordain the radical. Let us bless and consecrate radicality. Let us ordain radical truth and the radical truth teller. Let us ordain radical faith and the radically faithful. Let us ordain radical justice and the radical justice seeker. Let us ordain radical peace and the radical peacemaker. Let us ordain radical love and the radical lover. Let us bless, consecrate, and ordain the radical, extreme, basic and the excellent in ourselves.