



For Immediate Release
June 29, 2020

Contact: John Andrews
(909) 255-4865

Father Guzman joins priesthood in ‘Ordination like no other’

SAN BERNARDINO— In a year that Bishop Gerald Barnes described as being “like no other,” Antonio Guzman still completed his journey to become a priest of the Diocese of San Bernardino.

Father Guzman was Ordained at Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral in San Bernardino on June 29. The Ordination Mass was celebrated under the current social distancing and public health directives of the Diocese, limiting attendance to 100 people. It was also livestreamed on Diocesan social media, where more than 3,500 people had watched by the next day.

As he spoke to the crowd at the conclusion of the liturgy, Fr. Guzman offered a message of gratitude.

“I want to thank God for calling me to this ministry of the priesthood. I thank all the people who have walked with me during this journey of discernment,” he said. “I ask for your prayers in the same way that I keep you in my prayers.”

Coadjutor Bishop Alberto Rojas and Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Rutilio del Riego joined Bishop Barnes in concelebrating the Mass. During his homily, Bishop Barnes alluded to his impending retirement – expected in June of 2021 – when he turned and addressed Fr. Guzman directly.

“You are the last of my sons that I will ordain as diocesan bishop. So, I get a little emotional,” Bishop Barnes said in Spanish, “but look who the Lord has sent me to ordain, one of his best children.”

Earlier Bishop Barnes made reference to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on milestone public events like graduations, weddings, baptisms and holiday gatherings.

“A lot of people had plans this year,” he said. “All of it had to be done in different ways.”

Father Guzman’s Ordination was no exception. A native of Colima, Mexico he was unable to have his parents present for the Ordination because of challenges related to the pandemic. He did have several members of his extended family there to share the moment, however. An Ordination Mass is typically attended by hundreds of priests, but in this case the number had to be limited and most sat spread out in a section of pews in the Cathedral. A small group of seminarians, several who were classmates of Fr. Guzman in seminary, occupied another section of the church. A number of local laypersons who came to know Father Guzman during his parish internship were also at the Ordination.

All were required to wear a face mask. The book of Ordination prayers sat on a stand for the Bishop to read rather than being held by an altar server. All of the participants applied hand sanitizer throughout the liturgy, including all of the priests who processed to the altar for the laying on of the hands ritual. At the close, Fr. Guzman offered a blessing to all of his family members from the ambo, departing from the custom of blessing each person individually with a touch of their forehead.

“The world has changed with this virus and I am with the people,” Father Guzman said in an interview the week prior to his Ordination. “Who am I to not be part of this, too?”

When COVID-19 directives began to take effect he returned early from Assumption Seminary in San Antonio to complete his studies at St. Junipero Serra House of Formation in Grand Terrace. Local

Catholics got to know him in a unique way as he served Mass and read the Gospel at most of the Diocesan Masses that were livestreamed from Serra House and viewed by thousands of people every Sunday.

Fr. Guzman's Ordination took place on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Bishop Barnes called on the faithful to turn to these two "roots" of the Church in the difficult present days of the pandemic.

"We've been given the strength to live through difficult times," he said. "We know our God is waiting for us. It gives us inner peace."

In his final remarks, Bishop Barnes announced the Fr. Guzman's first assignment as a priest will be at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Riverside, effective July 1.

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