

**Homily – Silver Jubilee Mass for Fr. Ignatius Okonkwo
St. Matthew Catholic Church – September 9, 2023**

“Say not, ‘I am too young.’” (Jer). I think those words fit you perfectly, Father Ignatius. Happy Silver Jubilee! We rejoice with you in the fact that you are no longer physically young, although young in spirit. Praised be God for your fidelity!

Jeremiah had to live through very hard times for his people. God asked him to denounce the wickedness of his people, and thus he earned criticism, attacks, and persecution. Despite all that, he describes his calling as familiar dialogue, in which he feels that God reaches out to touch his mouth. Relationships demand commitment, but when the relationship is with God, he demands complete surrender. Relationships change us, but when the relationship is with God, He changes us completely.

You are no longer a child, Father Ignatius. The Lord has been with you all along, supporting you through thick and thin; transforming you. You have gone where he has sent you. You have spoken his words even when the message is difficult and unwelcome. Like Jeremiah’s faith, yours is big enough to be able to witness to your calling twenty-five years after your ordination. Through your faith, the Holy Spirit keeps you faithful.

“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.” (2 Cor). St. Thérèse of Lisieux wrote: “Our Lord knew that I was far too weak to face temptation... (...) I cannot take any credit for not getting in entangled in this way; it was only because God had mercy on me and preserved me.” Whether we have needed to be forgiven or done

something right, it is always the fruit of God's mercy. Upon gazing at us mercifully, God has chosen us, as Pope Francis' motto expresses. St. Paul says: "Since we have this ministry through the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged." (2 Cor). It is the work of the Lord.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

"Remain in my love." (Jn). Our relationship with the Lord is modeled by his own relationship with the Father. Jesus is faithful to the end. There is no better expression of fidelity than the Cross. On the ground of pure humanity, his mother remains standing at the foot of the cross. Twenty-five years ago, you said yes, like our Blessed Mother did at the Annunciation. You were invited to participate in the Lord's priesthood next to his altar. At the same time, you were invited to participate in the offering of himself, offering your own life, your service to his people, and the lives of his children. Remain in his love. "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." This is only the beginning!

As someone with a few more years of experience than you, and who knows many holy people, let me give you a final piece of advice. It is not that you do not know this already, but it is always good to be reminded by a friend: Have a true and ardent devotion to the Blessed Mother. The Lord reserves for her intercession some of his greatest works. Have no fear, for she holds you under her shadow and protection.

May our Lady of Guadalupe keep you safe and help you remain faithful to the love you have received from her Son.