

BE Welcomes Richard Barrington Tomlinson, Diocese of Charleston

(The following is a biographical essay that Deacon Tomlinson wrote for the parish. His first mass was at Stella Maris on Sunday, November 22nd at 5:30)

I was born in 1949 and brought up in the Protestant Episcopal (Anglican) Church. My grandfather was an attorney and the Chancellor of the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey. He was very influential in introducing me to sacramental worship and Christian history. The services at his parish were very High Church (Anglo-Catholic). One of the most vivid memories of my youth was attending Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. I remember when the priest held up the chalice at the Consecration and said, “This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting Testament...” At that moment, I felt the presence of Our Lord very strongly, and I instinctively understood the connection between the Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the celebration of the Eucharist. In a word, I believed in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

I went to college at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, where I studied English, History and Psychology. As a young man, I drifted away from the Episcopal Church. But after a period of agnosticism, I soon recognized the need for God in my life. I was not really attracted to Protestantism, but I did explore various Eastern religions. But ultimately I found myself drawn towards Catholic Christianity, both for its theological profundity, its moral teachings, and its strong sense of history, tradition, and beauty in worship.

After a period of study and instruction, I converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1973. At that time, I considered a vocation to the priesthood, and I visited several religious orders. Although I enjoyed the visits, I soon realized that my understanding of Catholic faith and spirituality was in many ways immature and unformed. I thought that further preparation was necessary, and so I went back to school to study Philosophy,

Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. I greatly enjoyed those studies, and considered pursuing an advanced degree in Classics. But the necessity of earning a living forced me into the field of investments and financial management.

I also hoped that I would eventually marry and have a family. But the idea of the priesthood never totally left my mind. I was living and working in Princeton, New Jersey, and I continued as a practicing Catholic. I eventually found myself drawn into work for charitable and humanitarian causes. One major influence here was the Chaplain at Princeton University, Fr. Tom Hagen, OSFS. Father Tom had founded a soup kitchen in the slums of Philadelphia, the St. Francis Inn. And he also ran a mission organization in Haiti, called Hands Together. Fr. Tom encouraged my sense of vocation and I began to work for both of these organizations.

The Hands Together house in Port-au-Prince is next door to a Children's Hospital run by the Missionaries of Charity, and Fr. Tom would say Mass for the Sisters every morning. The first day I attended Mass in their Chapel—it was Easter Tuesday, 1996—I was overwhelmed by the simple beauty of the place. It was an oasis in a desert of poverty, ugliness, and despair. I knew then that I had a vocation to the priesthood and I resolved to follow Our Lord wherever He might lead me.

I was accepted as a Postulant by Fr. Tom's order, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, and I began Pre-Theology studies at the Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C. After two months, I left the Oblates, who did not have the strong prayer life and sense of community I was hoping to find. I lived with the Missionaries of Charity in Washington, where they have a home for people with AIDS and for homeless men and women. At the same time, I continued my studies at the Union, where I completed the Pre-Theology requirements and began theological studies.

After two years at the Union, I transferred to the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, where a more traditional course of study is offered. There I was introduced to the systematic theology of St. Thomas Aquinas through study of the *Summa*

Theologiae. I was also encouraged to resume my study of classical languages, Greek, Latin, and, especially, Hebrew.

In addition to my academic work, I engaged in pastoral ministry. I did a year-long Supervised Ministry and Seminar with Bethlehem House, a home for people with mental disabilities. I also did a year-long Supervised Ministry teaching the Scripture Class at St. Dominic's Parish in Washington. And I continued my work with the Missionaries of Charity, both with the AIDS patients and homeless people and also with youth groups in the summer.

I received my professional degree, the Master of Divinity, in 2002. I had found the intellectual work so meaningful that I continued to study for an advanced Pontifical degree, the License in Sacred Theology, at the Dominican House. (This is a research degree qualifying one to teach theology in a Catholic seminary or university). I was especially interested in Biblical theology and wrote my thesis on *Covenant Theology in the Prologue to the Book of Job*.

I received the STL in 2004, and spent the following year living and working at the Benedictine monastery in Washington, St. Anselm's Abbey, and also doing research for a possible doctoral dissertation. By then, I realized I had gone as far as I could towards the priesthood without the formal support of a Diocese or religious community. One of my professors knew the Bishop of Charleston and recommended me to him. I applied and was accepted by the Diocese of Charleston. I spent a year (2006-07) living and working in three parishes in different parts of the Diocese: Greenville, Summerville, and Sullivan's Island. I learned the basics of liturgical celebration and parish management, and was also engaged in pastoral visits, teaching, and catechesis. It was a wonderful and rewarding experience, both spiritually and personally.

Bishop Baker then wanted me to experience a seminary formation program, as well as to complete a doctorate in theology. He therefore decided to send me to the Beda College in Rome, a seminary for older vocations run by the bishops of England and Wales. There

I lived with seminarians from all over the world and was able to participate in the rich liturgical and spiritual life of Rome. I was also able to study for a doctorate in Biblical Studies at the Angelicum, the Dominican university in Rome. My doctoral dissertation is entitled *A Comparison of the Sacrifice of Isaac and the Prose Tale of the Book of Job*. The final version of the dissertation will be submitted this fall, and I hope to defend it early next year.

I was ordained a transitional deacon at St. Paul's Basilica in Rome on June 19th, the solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Bishop Guglielmone has assigned me to work as a deacon at Stella Maris and at Bishop England High School, and my priestly ordination was on Nov. 21st at the Church of St. Theresa the Little Flower in Summerville.