

Homily based on the readings from April 29, 2026 (Acts 12.24-13.5a;
John 12.44-50)

As many of you are aware, May 8 – a week from this coming Friday – will be the anniversary of the election of Pope Leo. You may also recall that today, the Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena, is another important anniversary – the consecration and installation of Richard Reidy as the sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Norwich. We should all be immensely grateful that the Lord granted us – in rapid succession – two such able and effective shepherds.

Within this context, today's first reading – from the Acts of the Apostles – seems especially appropriate. We see Paul and Barnabas about to undertake their first missionary journey. In preparation for this endeavor, the prophets and teachers of the Church at Antioch – inspired by the Holy Spirit – lay their hands upon both men, commissioning them to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is unlikely this was an actual ordination – in the technical, sacramental sense – but it clearly fits

within the same basic framework. After a period of prayer and fasting, the elders of the Church – recognizing that these two men have been set apart by the Lord – officially ratify the mission to which they have been called.

A major mistake that many people make, when they encounter such passages from the New Testament, is to view these events as belonging to a distant and inaccessible past. While 2000 years is a long time from a human perspective, it is practically nothing from God's vantage point. In terms of salvation history, we are still living in the same era as Paul, Barnabas, and all the other Apostles. The Church – as we know it now – was born on Pentecost. Nothing substantive has changed since then.

What we need to remember, of course, is that Pope Leo, Bishop Reidy, and all the other bishops of the Catholic Church are actually modern-day apostles. As the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us:

Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion, commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts. ... But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, “handing over” to them “the authority to teach in their own place.” This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face. (*Dei verbum* 7)

In other words, the existence of bishops is not an historical accident or an administrative convenience, but an absolute *necessity* to the life of the Church – as essential to our Christian identity as the Bible itself.

Although the men who hold these positions often fall short on a personal level – as the original Apostles most certainly did – what is important is not the men themselves, but the ministry they undertake. For the rest of

us – those who have *not* been called to bear this incredible responsibility
– our task is simple: pray for our bishops, serve them in whatever ways
we can, and receive with joy the fruits of their apostolic labors.