

HOMILY
June 16, 2006

Rev. Anthony Arguelles, Rector
Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Biloxi, Mississippi

My dear Brothers and Sisters let me introduce myself. I'm Father Anthony Arguelles, a classmate of your pastor, Father Andrew, ordained on May 18, 1974, for the Diocese of Biloxi, Mississippi.

It was an honor and privilege for me to accompany Father Andrew, your choir and parishioners to Ireland. We had a wonderful trip and just returned last night late. You can be very proud that your choir sang so beautifully at several of Ireland's cathedrals and churches. The priests in Ireland wanted to keep the choir and not let us come home.

My vocation to the priesthood began when I was a child with my parents, Louella and Ivon Arguelles, and with our pastor, Monsignor Kevin Bambrick, an Irish-born priest who came to Mississippi. It has always been a dream of mine to visit Father Bambrick's Ireland and see his family. That dream came true for me this week because of the invitation of Father Andrew to accompany your group. Thank you, Father Andrew.

Each one of us here is on a journey of faith, starting from the time when we were born and baptized into our Catholic faith and received the gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. We are all called and summoned by God to live out our Christian life and witness to God by our love and service to one another. We share our gifts and talents in ministry with one another who need us.

As today's gospel tells us, we are summoned (like the twelve Apostles) and sent out to minister to all God's people. Each of us has our own story of faith and how we have lived out our baptismal call. I am here today to share a little of my story, how I met Father Andrew, and how your parish community reached out to us in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

Many of you may wonder how Father Andrew and I met...two priests from different ends of the U.S. Well, back in 1966, we met at St. Meinrad Seminary College in southern Indiana. We graduated after four years of college and then went our separate ways to finish theology, Father Andrew to St. John in Detroit, and me to Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. We kept our friendship by visiting each other's families while in seminary and then, after ordination, by going on vacations over the years. Our friendship has grown over thirty-two years of priesthood, and we are like real brothers to each other and confidants.

Well, today, I am here to thank all of you for your prayers and financial support that you extended to me and my parishioners in Biloxi after the worst natural disaster in American history—the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. Father Andrew called me after the storm to see how you here at St. John's Davison could help us in our needs. Our Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral, parish buildings and school buildings suffered about \$1 million damage. But the real story was that forty percent of our parishioners lost everything—homes destroyed and jobs lost. We decided to set up a Hurricane Relief Fund for our parish and one for our school. Your donations totaled over \$60,000 to those funds. Because of your prayers and financial help, we were able to help over two hundred families with direct financial aid to purchase food, clothing, furnishings, school supplies, and needed personal items to begin to get their lives in order. Your help has given our parishioners and families hope to rebuild their lives.

Progress is being made every day. There are signs of hope every day as homes are rebuilt and jobs restored and businesses return. It will take years to recover what was lost. Many families have to make the difficult decision of whether to rebuild where they are or relocate inland and start over.

So, again, on behalf of all our families in Biloxi who received your prayers and financial help, I am here to thank you from the bottom of our hearts. To let you all know that your generosity was most appreciated and your money was put to good use. Because of your love and compassion, you were able to minister to countless people you will never meet. May God bless you all, and I ask you to continue to pray for us as we continue to rebuild our lives in south Mississippi.

Thank you so much.