“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3).

Twenty years ago, this coming weekend, I was finishing up my 4th year in the seminary and preparing to return to Alaska for a retreat at the Holy Spirit Center in Anchorage. Just like Barnabas and Saul, I spent time in prayer by making a week long retreat. The history that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles still guides the church today.

When the Apostles laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, they invoked the Holy Spirit to come upon them and offer the gifts the two would need to serve the church and to share the Good News. At Sacred Heart Cathedral on Pentecost Sunday in the Jubilee Year 2000, Bishop Mike laid hands on me as part of the rite of ordination as a transitional deacon. After being vested with a stole and dalmatic, the bishop placed the Book of The Gospels in my hands and prayed: Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.

After ordination, I spent my summer in Nome, and when the pastor was away, I led the Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest. KNOM listeners heard my first radio homily in the summer of 2000. It is not easy to stand in front of others and to preach. Like the apostles, I too am a human with many faults and failings. I was so nervous presiding that first Sunday that I tied my stomach up in knots.

I thought that my stomach would feel better once Sunday passed. But it did not. The pain in the stomach remained and several days later, I went to Norton Sound Hospital to see a physician’s assistant. She had been at Saint Joseph Church on Sunday. When I explained how I felt on the inside, she shared her experience of what things looked like from her perspective. She said, I appeared much calmer on the outside than I felt on the inside. Her reassuring words helped me and the knot in the stomach went away.

Less than two months after my ordination, Fr John finished the Sunday Morning Mass at Saint Joseph and we headed to Cape Wooley to offer Mass for the King Island Community at fish camp. Sadly, we learned that Bishop Mike had died in Emmonak on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Everyone was stunned and saddened. I remember wondering who would lay hands on me the following summer. A selfish and all too human thought on my part. Rose Koezuna, shared a little bit of wisdom to calm me down. “Don’t worry, we’ll find someone to ordain you.”

A few days later, Tom Bush asked retired Archbishop Hurley, if he would come to Nome the following year and ordain me a priest. Someone who understood church protocol, turned to scold Tom and tell him that is not how things are done. Tom shrugged his shoulders and said, “But he said ‘yes’.” Following my final year of seminary and another retreat in Anchorage at the Holy Spirit Center, I returned to Nome for the summer. In July, Archbishop Hurley flew to Nome for my ordination, and the laying on of hands for priestly ordination.

I am thankful to both bishops for invoking the Holy Spirit through the right of ordination. But I must also give credit to the physician’s assistant, to Rose Koezuna, and to Tom Busch. At our baptism, we all receive a share of the Holy Spirit. We are given the promise of eternal life, and we also share in the common priesthood of Jesus Christ. Each member of the church is called to be a priest, prophet and king.

Sent forth by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the word of God in Salamis. Each of us hears the Gospel and God calls each of us to preach it with our lives.