

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

FRIDAY 10 JUNE 2011.

HOMILY:

We all come to this Mass and Ordination with a great humility of heart. Here, this evening, we seek only one thing: to do the will of the Lord as expressed in the Church. This evening as we celebrate the entry into the Catholic priesthood in the full visible unity of the Catholic Church of these five men, we thank God for all that He gives to us. Indeed we are humble before Him because it is His plan that we are following. That belief alone is the source of our courage and resilience.

Following the Lord is never an easy path. And those who are following the pathway of the Ordinariate certainly know that. As a young 9 year old write to me recently: 'Follow the Lord; you won't be bored!' But perhaps we sometimes wish that the Good Lord would make things a little clearer for us all.

What we want is to be His instruments. This is particularly true for every priest. We are no more than instruments in the hands of the Lord, which we will use to bring his grace and peace, through Word and Sacrament, to His people.

The Gospel we have just heard reminds us that to be ordained is to step out with Peter. Peter leads our journey: both in this passage, and in the life of the Church. And, at the heart of this journey we always must find his triple confession of love of the Lord. This is the one absolute necessity. We too must be able to answer, every day, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Only then will we go where we are taken, and no longer 'put on our own belt and walk where we like'. Here is the abandonment to the Lord which is so much needed in the life of the priest. As I have said, in our priestly ministry, we are instruments, no more, in the hand of the Lord. We are not leaders, nor conductors, nor composers – simply instruments, sensitive and responsive to the will of the Father, the example of the Son and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We are ready to serve the holiness of our people, and we are focussed on the Lord.

An inspiring phrase for us comes from Pope Benedict: 'The only treasure which ultimately the people desire to find in a priest is God.' (16 March 2009) This is the true treasure which we bring, which lies at the heart of our ministry, confirmed in this ordination this evening.

Each one of us knows that this will not be so unless there is, within our lives, a constant recognition of our own shortcomings and the practice of repentance. This was the experience of Peter. His proclamation of love for the Lord, his leading role in the Church, was all utterly dependent on his own experience of forgiveness for his betrayals.

Every time I hear the words of St Paul, from the opening sentence of our First Reading, a little dread enters my heart. He tells us: 'Lead a life worthy of your vocation.' So often I fall short, preoccupied with my own thoughts, with my own

plans, with my own self-importance. Only with forgiveness, through confession and reconciliation, can we grow into such a way of life. The triple confession of our love for the Lord has to be matched with a constant confession of our own faults. It is in the confessional that we are, in St Paul's words, formed into maturity, into the fullness of Christ.

So we priests are to be both penitents and ministers of that reconciliation. As its ministers we are both a servant and prudent dispenser of Divine mercy, of the saving action of God which we so need ourselves and joyfully bring to others. As Pope Benedict has said: 'Only by letting myself be forgiven do I learn to forgive others.'

There is another aspect of our priestly ministry put before us by St Paul which has a special place in our prayer this evening. We are to be ministers of unity. St Paul says it over and over again: Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit... There is one Body, one Spirit... one and the same hope... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God.' We are to construct 'a unity in the work of service', coming to unity, in its fullness, in Christ himself.

Our conviction is clear: our pathway to unity is by immersing ourselves in the depth and truth of the Catholic faith, within the visible unity of the Church, for that is the source of unity, the summons to unity. This gift of unity, going beyond our past and present experiences, gives us hope and confidence, in our lives and in our mission. And it will be seen in our unity together in the work of service.

Today, the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham takes another step. It is warmly welcomed within our Catholic community. You, its first priests, together with Mgr Keith, now have the sensitive task of responding with joy and thankfulness to that welcome and becoming clearly part – a new part – of this one Catholic family.

In our society today, there is such an endless competition between our selfishness and our instincts for belonging. In this struggle, in many places, our selfishness has been winning. The result is a profound weakening of the subtle ties that bind us to one another in society, in every community. As a result people often feel increasingly frightened and alone. (cf J Sacks, *New Statesman*, 13 June 2011) The mission which we accept and renew this evening is that of offering to our world the one, true source of lasting unity and of the joy and hope which it brings.

May God bless your new ministry with and among us. May we, together, always be ready to serve the Lord, always be ready to say in the depth of our being: 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Then will our priesthood be fruitful and our mission well founded. Amen

+Vincent Nichols