

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

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ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, CARDIFF

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In the Millennium year of 2000, the National Gallery in London mounted an exhibition called "Seeing Salvation". It traced the image of Christ in sculpture, painting and drawing over the last 2000 years. It was an extraordinary success.

Two pictures hung together. One was by the 16th century artist Titian and was called "Noli me Tangere". In the Easter Garden, the newly risen Jesus says to Mary of Magdala "Do not touch me". The other picture was by the 17th century artist Benjamino Strozzi. It was called "The Incredulity of St. Thomas". It portrays the scene we have just heard in the gospel. Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared to the disciples. He refused to believe. The picture shows Jesus drawing the finger of Thomas to His wounds. In that action, Jesus says to Thomas "Touch me".

Each of these pictures shows different aspects of the life of faith. There are times when we need to touch, to feel, to be reassured, to feel confident in our journey. "Touch me". And there are other times when we must walk by faith alone, having few of the traditional "comforts" as we used to call them, struggling to make sense of changing situations and circumstances. Rowan Williams writes: *"Mary Magdalene tried to cling to a Jesus from the past – her past. Her initial reaction must have been that the impossible had happened; that history had been reversed. It hadn't, of course. The friends and enemies of Jesus had made irrevocable decisions surrounding it. Now, in the light of the resurrection, they have to decide what to do with their compromise"*.

Bernard, there is much certainty and security in your life. The love of your wife Karla and your children. Your professional and theological formation. Your relationship with Jesus Christ. But in recent years, there has also been the uncertainty of your place within the Anglican Communion, and your questions as to how and where you were being called to serve Jesus as a priest. That discernment has been long and thorough and led you into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. It has called you to place your trust in the unique expression of Catholic life which is the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. Your journey of faith will continue to be a challenge and a comfort to those who have been sustained by you as they, too, discern the fullness of Christ's Church, which subsists in the Catholic Church.

In a few moments time, you will prostrate yourself before the altar whilst we pray to the saints on your behalf. It is a reminder you are not alone. "Saints of God, come to his aid". The prostration is a gesture of humility. "Lord I am not worthy". It is a gesture of abandonment. "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will". It is a gesture of trust. "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit". The laying on of hands will link you to the apostolic mission and identify you with the bishop in whose ministry you will share.

You will be clothed with priestly garments to remind you that this is not a privatised, functional priesthood. Speaking at last year's Mass of Chrism, Pope Francis said *"The names of the Children of Israel were engraved on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, the ancestor of our present day chasuble (Ex.28:6-14). This means the priest celebrates by carrying on his shoulder the people entrusted to his care and bearing their names on his heart"*. (Diocese of Rome. Maundy Thursday 2013)

The Oil of Chrism with which your hands will be anointed is named after Christ, the anointed one. Holy oil reminds us that we are signed, or sealed, guaranteed that the work we undertake is God's work. He works through us and with us and in us as we lead people to worship Him through re-remembering

the sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ. The Old Testament Song of Songs describes this bond well when it says *“Set me as a seal upon your hear, like a seal on your arm. For love is strong – as death”*. (Song of Songs 8:6).

When the new priest is given the gifts of the people, bread and wine, the work of human hands, to be offered to God, he knows that he will continually have to make an offering of himself as the one who re-presents, represents Jesus Christ to the people he serves. “This is my Body” are words which signify nothing less than the total offering of self in communion with God and the People of God who testify that you have been found worthy.

“Accept the gifts of the people to be offered to Him.

Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate.

Model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross”.

That cross reminds priests, and bishops, that we are wounded healers. It teaches that we need to be embraced by the wounded hands of our Saviour so that we in turn can heal other. Only then can we truly say on our own behalf and on behalf of our people the words of Thomas: *“My Lord and my God”*.