

HOMILY FOR MASS OF ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY OR HOLY ORDERS

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ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL

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Although the financial crisis, which surrounds the Greek economy, has forced that country into the news headlines recently, western civilisation is linked to Greece in more ways than mere money! Greek philosophy is still the foundation of the way in which we think. Greece is the birthplace of the democracy on which our political life depends. And Greek architecture still remains one of the purist forms of artistic expression.

So when St. John tells us in today's gospel that 'some Greeks' wanted to 'see' Jesus, he is saying something very important about natives of that country. They didn't just want to observe Jesus in a passive way. They weren't just casual passers by. These Greeks were in Jerusalem – a long way from Greece. They were attending the festival. They were worshipping at the Temple. They were seekers after faith. They wanted to know Jesus and his teachings. And being human, they approached him through familiar, friendly people who spoke their language. Was it an accident that they spoke first with two of his followers who had Greek names: Philip and Andrew?

The reason this gospel passage is read so near Holy Week is because of the lesson Jesus continually teaches. If you want to see me, if you want to understand me, if you want to know me, if you wish me to direct your life, you will recognise me in the following ways. You have to understand suffering and death. You have to let go of the things that you think give meaning to life and learn to trust in the presence of God in the most confusing circumstances. If you can believe that God can stoop so low as to be a servant to you all; can be

put on a cross; can be wiped out by human malice; then that says something about how you face those negative, painful, sinful experiences in your own life. 'When I am lifted up from the earth' you will recognise me – and recognise that nothing in your life or death is wasted in the sight of God.

Each one of us knows that it is not easy to grapple alone with those truths in life. We need guidance and support. We need help to be brought to 'see' Jesus and understand the pattern of his life, death and resurrection re-presented in our own lives. The whole life of the Church, the pattern of our prayer and worship, the lessons for life we are taught and try to follow are all part and parcel of that 'knowing' Jesus as the Greeks did. And we need the Philips and Andrews to bring us to Jesus – and bring Jesus to us. The role of Bishops, priests and deacons to seekers after Jesus and followers of Jesus is to be the welcomers, the familiar face, the public figure, making Jesus present in the very public acts of worship such as the Mass, and in the quiet ministries of comforting and healing which we undertake in the name of the Church.

That is one reason why there are such public steps to be made by a candidate for ordination to the Diaconate as he approaches this ministry. 'Admission to candidacy' makes him a public figure in the life of the Church, a disciple of Jesus whom people can recognise because he speaks their language. People will come to the Deacon with the request: 'Sir, we would like to see Jesus' in many different circumstances of life. And although Michael may not be able to speak Greek, he will be a familiar face to so many of those who ask that question in his own parish and ministry. As one preparing to be a Deacon, Michael is called to guide people in the steps they make to knowing who Jesus is, and how he wishes to be present in their lives, not just as somebody to be 'seen' but to be known and loved and embraced. Jesus said 'When I am lifted up, I shall draw all people to myself'. Through his dying and rising Jesus 'lifts up' our fallen world. That is what we hear on this Fifth Sunday of lent. It is what we shall be celebrating shortly during Holy Week and Easter.

(SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 31:31-34 Hebrews 5:7-9 John 12:20-30)