

DIACONAL ORDINATION OF REV. BERNARD SIXTUS
EPIPHANY SUNDAY - 5 JANUARY 2014
ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, CARDIFF
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

“Like me, you were a long time in coming. The shepherds were here before you. Even the cattle.....” Those words are not a commentary on the journey Bernard has made from Germany to Lincolnshire, from Gibraltar in Europe to Monmouth. And then into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. Rather they are words spoken by the Empress Helena to the Wise Men in the novel by Evelyn Waugh. In her vision, she sees them arrive at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to which she journeyed in the 4th century. She goes on: “How laboriously you came, taking in sights and calculating, where the shepherds had run barefoot. When you saw the star, what did you do? You stopped to call on King Herod. Deadly exchange of compliments in which began the unending war of mobs and magistrates against the innocent”. Even the wisest of people lead complex lives, and come to Jesus by roundabout ways, with differing life stories, often with false perceptions and wrong starts. That means all of us!

Our new Deacon will have a specific role in guiding others, not least through the labyrinthine ways of the modern education system of which the Catholic school is such an important part. His mission will be to inspire and give a vision of the meaning and purpose of human existence. He will have to give guidance and direction both inside and outside the Church to what is good and true and holy. He will personify, through his own faith journey and his ministry, that every person is on the same journey, looking for happiness, fulfillment, seeking after truth. That is why Pope Paul VI said: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses rather than teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses”. (Evangeliu Nuntiandi).

No person, whether, Deacon, Priest or Bishop sustain this inspirational journeying and guidance alone. The landscape in which we practice our faith has changed much in recent years. The familiar signposts are no longer there. The language of faith has been lost to many, not least in the sometimes conflicting words which describe human endeavours.

That is why powerful words which accompany the presentation of the Book of the Gospels are spoken to the new Deacon:

Believe what you read.
Teach what you believe,
And practice what you teach.

Helena continues her conversation with the Wise Men. “You came and were not turned away...Your gifts were not needed, but they were accepted and carefully put by because they were brought by love”. The gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, full of symbolism of Kingship, Godhead, Death and Resurrection. The actions of the Rite of Ordination are full of symbolism too. Bernard will prostrate himself in front of the altar, a sign of abandonment to the will of God. A sign of dependence on the love of God. A sign of his unworthiness for this office. The Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Consecration. That ancient Apostolic gesture and those powerful words: “That he may be strengthened by the gift of sevenfold grace”. Bernard brings his special gifts to this ministry. The Holy Spirit, working in the Church, offers him special gifts too. Bernard will be clothed in a Deacon’s vestments to remind him, and us, that this ordination is not a private endeavour but unites him with the saving work of Christ, entrusted to the Church and served by its ministers.

“You are my special patrons”...says Helena “...and patrons of all latecomers, of all who have a tedious journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with knowledge and speculation”. One of the great gifts you bring to this new ministry is the love of Karla your wife and your children. They will give you added strength and support as you continue to follow the guiding star which will bring us to Jesus, the Word of God, made Flesh. Not just for us, but for the many searchers in the different worlds and circumstances in which you will exercise your new responsibilities.

May God who has begun the good work in you,
Bring it to fulfillment. Amen.