

## ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

REV. MICHAEL DOYLE

ST.DAVID'S CATHEDRAL

MOST REV. GEORGE STACK

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Just one month ago today, a well loved priest of the Diocese of Cardiff died in Ireland. Canon Frank Mulvey was seventy six years old and had been a priest for fifty five years. The words people use to describe him are gentle, humble and unassuming. He was a prodigious visitor of the sick, committed to caring for the poor, not least through his support of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. His "specialised apostolate" was to the Travelling Community who will miss him in a particular way.

Why do I speak of that good priest today? Simply because the ordination of a new priest for the Diocese of Cardiff builds on the faith, dedication and generosity of priests and people who have gone before us. *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, O Lord, and a light to my path" (Ps.119)*. No priest is alone. We walk in the footsteps of those priests who have taught us the ways of faith, not just in their words but through their example and in the quality of their lives and ministry.

But of course we have to make that faith our own, as does every follower of Christ. As priests, we are formed, directed, ordered,

ordained to teach that living faith, to personify it in the way Jesus did in laying down his life for his friends. We do that in the very different circumstances of our own time when the signposts and supports of faith and belief are hardly recognised in a secular world. Cardinal Basil Hume put it well when he spoke of the Church today as not being that of Solomon's Temple, but rather Abraham's tent. The words of the prophet Jeremiah must surely be in the mind and heart of every priest when we reflect on our human inadequacies, and how we fail not just in speaking God's word, but being God's healing word to others. We are given comfort and strength from the Word of God addressed not just to Jeremiah but to each of us down the ages: "Go to those to whom I send you...Do not be afraid...I am here to protect you".

The Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Consecration, which lie at the heart of the ordination ceremony, are signs of that reassurance, guidance and protection in the midst of challenging situations. That gesture, and the prayer which follows, link the new priest to the apostolic tradition, link him to the ministry of the bishop who is the sign of the apostolic reality. One purpose of that link is to ensure that ours is not a privatised priesthood. It shows that we ourselves are signs of the communion at which we preside and which we minister. *"Proclaim his help day by day. Tell among the people his glory"*. It is the day-by-day mundane things, which are the killer. The routine. The administration. The regular demands. *"Stay in the same house.... Do not move from house to house...Eat what is put before you"*. Be consistent. Be dedicated. Live in the grace of the present moment. The Church of Abraham's tent must certainly *"Go out to the world and proclaim the Good News"*. But equally it must be rooted, *"remain in the same house"* and see in this demand, that encounter,

those burdens which the priest is asked to help carry a priesthood of authentic service. Summed up regularly in the beautiful words, which will be a hallmark of your priesthood, Michael. "Please pray for me, Father".

The last great symbolic action of rite of ordination is the "Traditio Instrumentorum" – the handing over of the instruments. The bread and wine to be offered at Mass are presented to the new priest with the paten and chalice, which are the most recognisable signs of our priesthood. As you raise up these offerings day by day, Michael, you will say they are "*the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands*". In that action, you will know that they symbolise the joys and hopes, the sadness and failures of all those gathered around you in communion with God and each other. One of our popular hymns puts it in different words:

*"Take all that daily toil plants in our hearts poor soil;*

*Take all we start and spoil, each hopeful dream.*

*The chances we have missed, the graces we resist,*

*Lord, in thy eucharist, take and redeem".*

The instruction of the Bishop during this action will be both a comfort and a challenge to you Michael.

*"Accept from the holy people of God the gifts 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".*

What more needs to be said?