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One of the most moving moments in the Solemn Profession of a monk must surely be when the candidate sings the words of the Suscipe from Psalm 119. *“Uphold me, O Lord, according to your word and I shall live; Let me not be confounded in my hope”*. He sings those words three times; possibly reflecting on the threefold question Jesus asked of Peter *“Do you love me?”* Having denied Jesus three times, Peter had a lot to learn about fidelity! The Suscipe is a prayer of trust. It is a prayer of hope. It is a prayer of abandonment. It is the heart of a Religious Life lived in union with Jesus Christ who never abandons us.

In a few moments time, Jonathan will prostrate himself before the altar as he did on the day of his Religious Profession. We sing the Litany of the Saints; another prayer of trust and hope. The Litany is a reminder that he is not alone in this ministry. He is inspired by the example of the lives of the saints and supported by the prayers and goodness of so many people.” Bless this chosen man. Make him holy. Consecrate him for his sacred duties”. Bishops, Priests and Deacons are called to exercise a public ministry in glorifying God and empowering God’s people to worship Him in and through and with Jesus Christ. This ministry is focussed, directed, ordered, ordained towards enabling the faithful truly become what they have been consecrated to be through Baptism: The Priestly People of God.

The words and actions of this ordination ceremony spell out very clearly how this is to be done. The key came at the very beginning when the candidate promised obedience to his Ordinary, the Abbot, the Father of the Monastery. The word obedience comes from *ob audire* – turning a listening ear. Obedience is primarily a thing of the heart, sensing the impulse of the Holy Spirit in words and actions. St. Benedict puts it exquisitely, as always, in the Rule:

*“Listen my son to the precepts of your Master*

*And incline the ear of your heart.*

*Cheerfully receive and faithfully return obedience to Him”.*

Blessed John Henry Newman put it well, too, when he wrote of “Heart speaking to Heart” in the freedom of the total self-giving, which is shown in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and reflected in the gift, the grace, which is ours in this ministry.

Should there be any doubt of all this involves, the prayer for the ordination of a Deacon expresses it clearly:

*“May he excel in every virtue:*

*In love that is sincere,*

*In concern for the sick and the poor,*

*In unassuming authority,*

*In self-discipline and in holiness of life.*

*May he in this life imitate your Son*

*Who came, not to be served but to serve,*

*And one day reign with Him in heaven”.*

On the day of his Profession, Jonathan was clothed in the religious habit with all that symbolises. Today he will be clothed in the Deacon’s stole and Dalmatic to remind him continually to “put on Christ”. In public ministry, our new Deacon will learn that he is continually enveloped by Christ, not least in the many ways that people put their trust in the one who is ordained to speak and act in the name of Christ. People allow us privileged access into their lives because of the ministry entrusted to us. They trust as we ministers must learn to trust. Jonathan will learn, as every deacon, priest and bishop must, that these vestments cover our human frailty and inadequacy. They remind us that the message we preach is not ourselves but Christ crucified and risen.

The ordination of a Deacon concludes with the presentation of the Book of the Gospels. From the gospels he has already drawn inspiration to pray and to study. Now he must learn to preach. Jonathan will learn very quickly that the authentic word of God isn’t preached just by standing in a pulpit or even sitting

in a chair. It is preached in the holiness of the actions of our lives. The words spoken during this presentation are both a comfort and a challenge to the one who is being ordained: "Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practice what you teach".

But there is a final word, a word of prayer, which looks forward to the years that lie ahead:

*"May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment. Amen".*