

HOMILY FOR THE ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

DOM PATRICK LOBO OSB

BELMONT ABBEY HEREFORD

27 JUNE 2017

ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

One of the many beautiful and symbolic moments of this ordination ceremony is when the candidate prostrates himself before the altar whilst the people join in the Litany of the Saints. That prostration is a sign of many things. It is a gesture of abandonment and trust. "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will". It is a gesture of humility. "Lord, I am not worthy". It is a gesture of dependence on God and other people. "Saints of God, come to his aid". These thoughts and prayers will surely be in the mind and heart of Patrick Lobo at his ordination to the priesthood.

There is another time when the son of St. Benedict prostrates himself before the altar and hands his life over to God. That is at his final profession as a monk. It is then that the prayer of trust contained in the words of the "Suscipe" are sung:

"Uphold me, Lord, according to your promise and I shall live; And do not bring to nothing all my hope".

Other words and images are presented to the new priest, not least from the scripture readings chosen for the ordination Mass. The words addressed to the prophet Jeremiah ring down the ages and

are addressed to the one who is called as minister of word and sacrament. When faced with the awesome task of speaking the Word of God in the words of the people, every ordained person is aware of his limitations and responsibilities. No wonder Jeremiah tried to avoid the responsibility of God's call to prophesy, knowing that he was summoned to warn the people of the invasion of Israel and destruction of Jerusalem. But it was God's word he was appointed to preach, not his own. "Look, I putting my words in to your mouth". The preaching of Jeremiah was to be a comfort as well as a challenge. The role of the preacher is not just to condemn but to give life and hope. Pope Francis puts this so well when he says:

"The preacher needs to keep his ear to the people and to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear. A preacher has to contemplate the word, but he also has to contemplate his people. In this way, he learns of the aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, whilst paying attention to actual people, using their language, their signs and their symbols to answer the questions they ask." Evangelii Gaudium 154).

The time comes when no words are sufficient in trying to explain or understand our belief in God, or rather God's belief in us. Actions speak louder than words, not least in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. His self-sacrificing love for humanity brought him to suffering and death. The 14th century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, hears Jesus speak in her "Revelations of Divine Love". "What more could I have done for you? If I could suffer more, I should suffer more". That question is addressed to every restless heart.

“What more could I have done for you? If I could have done more, I would have done more”. The forgiveness the priest gives in the confessional ministry is rooted in those words to every penitent, no matter how hard we find it to believe. “If I could have suffered more for you, I should have suffered more”.

When words fail, the action of the Mass takes over. The priest is directed, ordered, ordained to offer the life-giving action of Christ himself. He is commissioned to re-present the saving work of Christ in –re-remembering, putting back together again, the broken body of Christ so that people may be brought into communion with the living reality of a share in God’s own life. No wonder we call it Holy Communion. Of course we receive Jesus in Holy Communion. But we are received by Jesus into Holy Communion with the Father. *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love”.* Self-sacrificing love is the meaning and the purpose of the ordained priesthood. The priesthood of all the baptised is the service of God in union with Christ. The ordained priesthood is Christ’s service of the people in order to enable them to become what they are called to be through their Baptism.

“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 cross of Christ”.

Let the final words be those of Julian of Norwich once more:

“Would you know the Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love. Keep yourself therein and you shall understand.”