



Homily for the Ordination to the Diaconate of Peter Davies

2 December 2017

“Take the waiting out of wanting” was the strapline of one of the most striking Christmas advertisements I have ever seen. It feeds into the culture of instant satisfaction and gratification, the culture of “I want therefore I must have now” no matter what the impact on my credit card might be. Analysing the causes of the financial crisis of 2008, one analyst wrote: *“... people buying things they didn’t need with money they didn’t have for people they didn’t like”*. And waiting is a waste of time – whether it is for a bus or a train, or proper preparations for an important decision, or even making the right choices in life.

This Advent season says the opposite. It says no time is wasted in which God is served. The service of God is the sanctification of time. The watchwords of Advent are watching and waiting. Hope and expectation. “Come Lord Jesus Come” as we prepare to celebrate his coming in history two thousand years ago. “Come Lord Jesus” as we profess our faith that he will come at the end of time to judge the nations. As we heard from the prophet Isaiah: *“Oh that you would tear the heavens and come down”* (Is 64:1). But we also celebrate the fact that Jesus is present here and now, in our midst, *“Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there among them”* (Mt 18:20). Present also each time we celebrate the Mass and receive him in Holy Communion. Or more importantly are received by him into communion, allowing us to share in the very life of God himself. “The Body of Christ?” the priest asks. “Amen – I believe” we reply.

All of these truths take on a special significance today for Peter Davies and his family. Peter is to be ordained a deacon in the Catholic Church. He has waited on Jesus, prepared for this moment throughout his whole life – perhaps not even realising it. In his faith journey with Gloria his wife and his lovely family, they have continually prayed “Come Lord Jesus, Come” as they have explored ways in which each of them can be most faithful to Christ. The words of Cardinal Hume which we shall use during this ceremony indicate how significant the ministry of Peter has already been, both in the Anglican Church and in the extraordinarily important work of a hospital chaplain. Pope John Paul II agreed with the Cardinal who wrote:

“The Catholic Church recognises that not a few of the sacred actions of the Christian religion as carried out in communities separated from her can truly engender a life of grace and rightly be described as providing access to the community of salvation”.

When Peter is called forward for ordination, the Bishop is asked “Most Holy Father, holy mother Church asks you to ordain this man, our brother, for service as a deacon”. The bishop asks “Do you know him to be worthy?” The proposer will say - at least I hope he will say - “Upon enquiry among the people of Christ and upon recommendation of those concerned with his training, I testify that he has been found worthy”. On this subject Cardinal Hume also had something to say. *“The answer to that question should be an emphatic “No”. How could any human person be worthy of the privilege and the gift of serving God and his people through this Sacrament of Ordination?”*. Martin Luther, too, had a great deal to say about worthiness and justification as we know from this commemoration year. But at an ordination, the bishop puts his trust in God and continues “We rely on the help of the Lord God and our Saviour Jesus Christ and we choose this man for the order of deacons”.

The effectiveness and validity of Holy Orders does not depend on how good or how holy or how efficient or how well organised we deacons, priests and bishops are. In fact, it often seems as though God works through our weakness to remind us that we carry this treasure in earthenware vessels. Isaiah again: *“You are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand”* Is (64:3-8) as we heard in today’s reading from the prophet. No time for pride. No place for privatised priesthood. We are bound together, directed, ordered, ordained for the service of others, in order to help people become what they have been called to be through baptism – priests who worship God not in their individual ways, through and amalgam of personal devotions, but bound together in the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. No room for churchmanship or liturgical preferences or language. It is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross which is re-presented every time we celebrate the Mass (an

interesting word when thinking about the re-presentation of that sacrifice on the Cross). Perhaps “offer” is a better word, especially for the one who offers his life in service as a deacon and priest.

To remind the deacon of all this, and so much more which is contained in the ordination, Peter is surrounded by signs and symbols which speak much louder than words of that to which he is being called. Yes, he is questioned and asked does he believe what the Catholic Church teaches and is he able to preach those truths to others. The Bishop lays hands on his head, a sign of calling down the Spirit of God at this time, in this place, into the life of this person. That gesture, and the prayer of ordination which accompany it, is also a reminder that through the validly consecrated bishop, he is being drawn into the unity of the apostolic suggestion, personified by the Bishop of Rome and Catholic bishops throughout the world. Never Peter without the eleven. Never the eleven without Peter – the apostle, I mean, not Davies!

Immediately, he is clothed with the vestments of the deacon. The stole over his shoulder, a reminder of the Jewish prayer shawl used in the synagogue, but more importantly a reminder of the words of Jesus when he says “*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*” (Mt 11:30). As a hospital chaplain Peter will help countless people carry the burden of loneliness, sickness and death. The dalmatic which, like all vestments, cover a multitude of human weakness. They remind us we do not minister on our own authority but on the authority of the one we serve.

Which is why, at the climax of the ordination rite, he is given the Book of the Gospels with the words:

Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you now are.

Believe what you read.

*Teach what you believe,
And practice what you preach.*