



**Homily for the Ordination to the Priesthood of**

**Rev'd Peter Davies**

**29 June 2018 (Solemnity of St Peter & St Paul)**

**St. Brigid's, Cardiff**

**Archbishop George Stack**

If ever you go to Rome on pilgrimage, no doubt you will go straight to St. Peter's Basilica, not least because that is probably the most popular site in that historic city. Before you admire the statue of the Pieta on the right and the tomb of the Royal House of Stuart on the left, go straight to the high altar. Then turn left and go down the steps to the crypt beneath. Go descend to an even lower level to find the excavations of a Roman cemetery deep beneath. If you have a guide, ask them to take you to a small window where you can look through and see a light shining on the tomb of the apostle Peter. He was martyred in Rome around 65 AD.

If you need to escape the heat of Rome, go to the beach at Ostia. Make sure you stop on the Via Ostiense at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls. Canon Matthew Jones knows it well, having studied in the college across the road for four years. In 2006 the excavations there revealed a marble sarcophagus deep beneath the altar with the Latin inscription "Paul, Apostle and Martyr". He was martyred in Rome in the year 67 AD beheaded on the orders of the emperor Nero.

History, tradition and devotion always mention Peter and Paul together. They are like two sides of a coin because they are the apostolic foundations of the Church, expressing fundamental truths about Jesus Christ which give life to the Church down to the present day. Peter is the symbol of unity.

He is the symbol of authority. If there was a dispute among the apostles, he was the one to whom the others referred. Today we say of the Pope and the bishops *“Never the eleven without Peter. Never Peter without the eleven.”* Paul, on the other hand, is the prophetic witness of the Church. He is the teacher, the missionary, the apostle to the Gentiles. He goes travelling all around the Mediterranean and the Middle East, writing letters to the small Christian communities in Corinth and Philippi, at Thessalonica and Colossae in modern day Greece.

Coming from very different backgrounds, and having very different personalities and experiences of Jesus, you can imagine Peter and Paul had their disagreements. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, modern day Turkey:

*“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face since he was a hypocrite”. Yet despite these differences they were reconciled. Paul writes again “The same person who made Peter the apostle of the circumcised has given me a similar mission to the Gentiles. So we shook hands as a sign of partnership. We were to preach to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. The only thing they insisted on was that we should remember the poor, as indeed I was anxious to do”.* The collection was important in the early Church as it is to the Church as today!

If you look at the wonderful hymn which we shall sing at the hymn at Communion you will see all of this summed up. The second verse reads:

*One taught mankind its creed, one guards the heavenly gate.*

*One by the sword achieved, one by the cross his fate.*

*With laurelled brows they hold eternal royalty.*

What has all this got to do with the ordination to the priesthood of Peter Davies? Well, he is being ordained into the apostolic ministry of the Church symbolised by a validly ordained bishop who, on this special occasion, is wearing the pallium given him by Pope Benedict XVI. This garment is a symbol of the unity of the Bishop of Cardiff with the Bishop of Rome the successor of the apostle Peter. Our own Peter and his wife Gloria have both been on their missionary journeys, not just with the Plymouth Brethren and the Baptists and the Church in Wales, but also to India, Nepal and Pakistan and Afghanistan. Peter has been on another journey, too, the journey within into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. He has made, and will continue to make, many journeys up and down the hospital corridors bringing the healing Word of God and the Sacrament of the Body of

Christ as Viaticum, food for the Journey to those who are sick and dying.

One of the most profound and beautiful descriptions of the Church given by the second Vatican Council is that “... *it is a divine and human interlocked reality*”. The human dimension will always have to face complex decisions, tensions perhaps, even disagreements. That is what it means to be human. But in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, we are bound together as members of one body, one family, belonging to each other, responsible for each other, signs to a fragmented world that “*people from every nation under heaven*” are united in a way which goes far deeper than any merely human institution.

These are the truths which our new priest will preach and teach, will minister and personify as he acts “*in persona Christi*” in the person of Christ. “*This is my Body. This is my Blood*”. Not his body, but my body. As St. Teresa of Avila wrote in the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

*“Christ has no body on earth now but yours.*

*No hands but yours.*

*Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good”.*

I have used too many words in linking this action of ordination to the ministry of the apostles. So, signs and symbols now have to take over. The laying on of hands. A wordless link with the apostolic succession. The clothing with the red vestment, the colour of the martyrs. A reminder of the sacrificial nature of priesthood. This is not an action of the individual, a private undertaking, but a public ministry which brings with it authority, yes, but also a life of sacrifice. The sign of the cross on the hands of the new priest with the Oil of Chrism, the oil of Christ. The *“Traditio”* the handing over of the chalice and paten which will contain the Bread of Life and the Spiritual Drink. Accompanied by these beautiful words spoken to the newly ordained:

*“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”.*

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