



**Homily for the Rite of the Ordination to the Diaconate of**

**Brother Gildas Parry, O.Praem.**

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Archbishop George Stack**

One of the most moving moments of the Solemn Profession of Brother Gildas must surely have been when he prostrated himself in front of the altar whilst the saints were invoked to guide, inspire and pray for him on this stage of his journey of faith and into the religious life. That prostration is a gesture of obedience. *“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”*. *Ob-audire*. To turn a listening ear to God in obedience. It is a gesture of abandonment. *“Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will”*. It is a gesture of trust: *“Do not be afraid ... I have put my words into your mouth”*.

During this ceremony of ordination to the diaconate, Brother Gildas once again lies prostrate before the altar. And just as during the Solemn Profession he was questioned as to his intentions, and desire for conversion of life through poverty, chastity and obedience and living the common life, so today he is questioned by the bishop for the public ministry of the diaconate which will also be his vocation.

Are you resolved to exercise this office humbly? Are you resolved to hold on to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience? Are you resolved to deepen your life of prayer? Are you resolved to shape your life according to the example of Jesus Christ? I am. I will. I do. With the Help of God. Brother Gildas has been preparing to answer each one of those all his life, in ways that are known and unknown. His

upbringing and cultural heritage in Wales. His education and theological studies. His journey into the Catholic Church. His professional life. And how could I fail to mention his amazing contribution to the life and ministry at Westminster Cathedral? Then his embrace of religious life in the Canons Regular of Premontre. Now another step, into the diaconate with a view to ordination to the priesthood, through which he will glorify God and sanctify God's people. No wonder he has been so long on the road!

The sons of St. Norbert follow the rule of St. Augustine, the fourth century bishop of Hippo in North Africa and a Doctor of the Church. Augustine had many changes of direction in his own life, much to the despair of his mother Monica. She prayed hard for his conversion. But conversion came in its own time and in its own strange circumstances. Writing later in his Confessions of his despair at the dissolute life which he was leading, Augustine said *"But when a deep consideration had, from the secret bottom of my soul, drawn together and heaped up all unseen, in the sigh of my heart, there arose a mighty storm bringing a mighty shower of tears"*. And he heard the voices of children playing and calling out *"Tolle, Lege"*. Take and read. Picking up the bible, and opening it at a random page, Augustine read the call to conversion about which Paul wrote to the Christians of Rome. The direction of

his life changed forever and he was baptised by St. Ambrose in Milan in the year 387.

An important act of this ordination ceremony is when the bishop repeats the action of the words heard by Augustine *“Tolle, Lege”*. Take and read. But don't just read the bible for your own devotion. The bible is handed to the new deacon with the instruction to make it accessible to the people. That is why the bishop is instructed to say:

*“Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach”.*

Brother Gildas is well able to read and teach and explain the revelation of God which unfolds in the scriptures. In his preaching he will know that the best sermons are not just preached in a church, or from a pulpit or even from a bishops chair! The real sermon is the example of faithful service you give, glorifying God and ministering to his people. Pope Francis gives the same advice as his patron, St. Francis of Assisi *“Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words”*.

Our new deacon will serve in a complex and complicated world – and I am not just thinking about the Canonry of Our Lady of Sorrows and St. Philip Benizi! The times and the circumstances through which the Church has lived have all had their own complexities. Once he became a bishop, St. Augustine was immersed in controversies and heresies which were in danger of splitting the Church apart. One of those was the Pelagian heresy which denied that humanity was suffering from the effects of Original Sin. We are still denying that, although we see the effects of Original Sin all around us. I am pleased to say, and Gildas will no doubt point out, that Augustine had an ally in St. David of Wales in the battle against Pelagianism. Over forty years, Augustine wrote 40 books and 2000 letters and I dare not mention how many sermons! The millions of words he wrote are as relevant today as they were in his own time. Just one reason why the Canons of Premontre have an important work to do today.

The ministry of the deacon is to help bring healing and wholeness to a world and to lives which are fragmented and broken in so many ways. The deacon is to be a minister of unity, a minister of communion. That is one reason why Brother Gildas will be asked if he is willing to shape his way of life according to the example of Christ whose sacramental body he will give to the people in Holy Communion. But he is

also called to build up the Body of Christ which is the People of God so that they, in turn, may be recognised as a sign of unity in society, coming as we do from so many different backgrounds. In Sermon 57 on the Eucharist, Augustine wrote: “See who you are. Become what you receive....If you, therefore, are Christ’s members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord’s table. You are saying “Amen” to who you are. Your response is a personal signature affirming your faith. When you hear “The Body of Christ” and reply “Amen” be a true member of that body so that your “Amen” may ring true”.

If those words must ring true in the lives of the people we serve, how much louder must the ringing be in the life of the one being ordained a deacon today? “May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment”. Amen.

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