



Conferral of Lectors

Homily

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**Sunday, 21 April 2013
St Charles Seminary, Guildford**

“I have made you a light for the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”.

These words from today’s first reading capture very well the vocation of the Church, and therefore the vocation which all the baptized share together. As you would all know from your studies one of the ways in which the Church understands herself, under the inspiration of the scriptures, is that she is the priestly people of God. Because there is only one priest, Jesus himself, and therefore only one priesthood, the priesthood of Jesus, this can only mean that the Church is in the mysterious plan of God drawn into this one priesthood of Christ. As the people of God, we share in Christ’s priestly identity and mission – it is his priesthood, not ours.

Most of you were at Fr Christopher Lim’s ordination on Friday night and you would have heard the words of the preface which remind us that *“Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own, but with a brother’s kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands”*.

The decision each one of you has made to enter the seminary, and even more today the decision which some of you have made to be instituted as Lectors, is made in the belief that you are among those men whom the Lord has chosen to become sharers in his sacred ministry. It is true that men who are not called to the ordained ministry can also be instituted as Lectors, but for each of you this morning the conferral of this ministry marks another important step in your journey of response to God’s call. I want to encourage you therefore to see this morning’s celebration in exactly that light. If you do it will help you to appreciate just how central the Word of God, which today you will be officially authorized to proclaim, not just in the liturgy but in other ways as well, must be in your life. Certainly, Paul and Barnabas understood this very well. Even though many of the Jewish people to whom they preached did not accept their teaching, these two great preachers and missionaries knew exactly what the Lord was asking of them. “We had to proclaim the Word of God to you” they said. “Now we must turn to the pagans, because this is what the Lord commanded us to do”. I hope that this morning’s celebration will deepen in you the same conviction and that you, like Paul and Barnabas, will also be able to say from your hearts, “We have to proclaim the Word of God”.



In understanding just what this might mean for you, and indeed for all of us, perhaps it is worth considering for a moment the famous quote attributed to St Francis of Assisi. He is certainly the flavor of the month in the light of the new Pope's election. Although an original text of the saying has not been located it is widely accepted that St Francis said to his brothers something like this: *preach the gospel always – and use words if you have to*. I want to say the same thing to you this morning. As men formally authorized by the Church to proclaim the Word of God, and as men who believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry, make sure that what you say with your lips and what you say with your lives are the same thing. In other words, be men of consistency and integrity.

This call to authenticity is captured very well in the words which, God willing, you will have addressed to you at the end of your ordination as deacons. On that occasion you will be handed the book of the gospels, much as I will soon hand you the bible. The words which accompany that gesture are both an invitation and a plea and I want to offer these words to you today, in anticipation of your hearing them again in the not-too-distant future:

Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.

Believe, teach and practice: but believe, teach, and practice what? Not, first and foremost a set of doctrines or a list of teachings or a collection of rules and regulations – although all these things are of great importance in the life of the Church. But we must always remember we do not have doctrines or teachings or rules at the heart of our lives as Christians. We have a person, Jesus, the Christ. It is He whom we are called to know, to love and to serve, it is he whom we are called to proclaim, and it is he who is the Word to whom we listen. The First letter of St John expresses it very well.

Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes, that we have watched, and touched with our hands, the Word, who is life – this is our subject.

In proclaiming the Word of God, then, whether it be in the liturgy, in teaching and catechetics, in prayer groups or simply in discussions with our friends, family and people we encounter in a variety of ways, let us always that it is a person, Jesus, the Word who is life, about whom we speak and for whom we live.

My last thought comes from this morning's gospel. This Word, who is life, speaks of himself in today's liturgy as the Good Shepherd and in this year's gospel, from chapter ten of John's gospel, he reminds his disciples, and therefore us who seek to be his disciples, that those who belong to him listen to his voice. We do belong to him of course because of our baptism, but as I mentioned at the beginning of this homily, "with a brother's kindness he has chosen men to become sharers in his sacred ministry". This is the journey on which you have all embarked and for those of you instituted today as lectors it is a journey which now takes on a new urgency.



May your proclaiming of the Word of God both deepen your knowledge and love of the Word, Jesus himself, who is life, and at the same time inspire you to come to know him more deeply in the Word which will soon be handed to you as a symbol, of the new role you play in the life of our Catholic community.