

Priestly Ordinations of Carmine-John Millen, Alexis Vega Osorio, Marlon Henao Perez, and Noe Navarrete Apaez

Homily by the Most Rev Tim Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth

Friday, 20 March, 2015 – St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

[Readings Jeremiah 1:4-9, Psalm 95:1-3,10, 2 Corinthians 4:1-2,5-7, John 15:9-17]

A few moments ago, in response to the assurances given to me by Fr Michael Moore and Fr Jean-Noel Marie on behalf of those who have been part of the formation of our four young deacons, and speaking in the name of the Church and of our archdiocese, I proclaimed that “relying on the help of the Lord God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we choose these our brothers for the Order of Priesthood”. It is a solemn moment but also one of joy as the applause with which we all greeted this proclamation shows. Tonight's gospel reminds us that it is also a moment of confirmation. CJ, Noe, Alexis and Marlon have only reached this crucial moment in their lives tonight after a long and sometimes challenging journey of discernment and discovery. In all kinds of ways, some of which each of our young deacons might be able to identify and some of which are hidden to them, God has been at work in their lives, whispering to them in their hearts, shaping and moulding them through moments of suffering and moments of joy, revealing himself to them in the people they have encountered and the challenges they have had to face. In all of this the words of tonight's gospel cry out to them: “You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last”.

For this reason it is very important that, in the midst of our congratulations and our thanks to them for their generosity in responding to the Lord's call – a generosity which will bring such richness to the lives of so many – we must also remind them, and ourselves, that for them and us there is nothing to boast about in this. To reach this overwhelming moment in their lives is not really an achievement although we might be tempted to think this way. It is simply a gift, freely given and yes, freely received. It is God's grace which has enabled them to hear the Lord speaking to them, it is God's grace which has given them the strength to respond, and it is God's grace, and only God's grace, which will carry them into the future and make of them the priests that the Lord and his Church need them to be. Of course tonight marks an ending. It marks an ending of the long period of formation for the priesthood, it marks an ending of seminary life, it marks, at least for the moment, the end of tertiary studies. But it must not mark the end of conversion, nor an end of openness to God's transforming grace, nor an end of the humility which every Christian needs to keep us grounded and deeply aware of our frailties and weaknesses.

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This quality of humility is very much what St Paul is speaking about in his letter to the Corinthians when he reminds his readers, and of course also us, that “we are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us”. The New Testament speaks often about treasure. In the gospels Jesus tells us that where our heart is there will our treasure also be. To discover what we have set our hearts on is really important for all of us and no more so than for newly ordained priests. For St Paul, in tonight's second reading the treasure of which he speaks is “the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ”. As the popular hymn “Earthen Vessels” phrases it, we have “one treasure only, the Lord, the Christ, in earthen vessels.” It is Christ who reveals the face of God to us: Christ who embodies, in the fullest sense of that word, the mind and heart of God. In the darkness of so many lives, where the face of God has been disfigured, or never even glimpsed, it is we, who because of our baptism are parts of his living body present in our world through his Church, who are being called by the Lord to reveal him, to unveil his face to others, so that people can come to know, really know, the true God, the God who is made known to us in Jesus. And precisely because this is the vocation of every member of the Church it is in a special way the vocation of all those called to the ministry through which Jesus continues to shepherd his Church.

CJ, Noe, Alexis and Marlon, from the moment of your baptism the words of St Paul in tonight's reading have been true for you: you hold a treasure within you which you are called to share with others. The

words of tonight's gospel have also been true for you from the day of your baptism: the Lord has chosen you, and he sends you to bear fruit for his kingdom. But from tonight onwards both these things take on a new meaning. Amongst all the ways in which the Lord calls his people to carry the treasure, to share it with joy and enthusiasm, and to protect it, you are being called to do so as ordained priests. You must put your whole lives at the service of the Church and make the unveiling of the face of Christ the driving force of everything you do. He must be the treasure which you hold close to your heart, contemplate often and deeply, come to appreciate each day more fully, and share generously, without counting the cost, with all those people to whom the Lord will send you. Because of what the Holy Spirit will do within you through this mystery of your priestly ordination, you must, in the words of Saint Augustine, "become what you are". This too will be pure gift rather than the result of your own unaided efforts no matter how earnest they are. But gifts have to be received and gifts are meant to be used and developed. This is your part to play. In the words of the Book of Revelation, "Look! I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone listens to my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will eat with me" (Rev 3:20).

Tonight the Lord says, personally, to each of you, "You did not choose me, no I chose you and I commission you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last". In a whole new way from tonight onwards this becomes your life. With the same hope which led you into the seminary, with the same hope that helped you through the difficult and challenging moments, with the same hope that brought you to your ordination as deacons, now step forward again and once more, with all your hearts, give your "yes" to the Lord.