



**Ordination to the Priesthood  
Deacons Liam Ryan, Matteo Verdi & Mark Rucci**

**Homily**

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 16 August, 2019  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

*You did not choose me. I chose you and commissioned you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last (John 15:16)*

According to St John's Gospel, these words were originally spoken by Jesus to his twelve disciples on the night before he died. Tonight, he says these same words to Liam, to Mark and to Matteo. I hope that each one of you hears these words in the depths of your heart, and that you allow yourselves to hear them over and over again as your priestly life unfolds. No matter what winding pathways you have travelled in order to find yourselves here this evening, and no matter how much you may at times have thought yourselves to be in charge of your journey determining every step, the reality is very different. God has brought you here and God will lead you forward into the future. Your part is to listen with attentiveness and humility and respond with courage.

*You did not choose me, I chose you:* the same words as those spoken 2000 years ago, but to different people tonight in a very different context. The Australia of 2019 could hardly be more different to the Palestine of 2000 years ago. The Church in 2019, the same Church founded by Jesus so long ago, nevertheless could in many respects hardly be more different to the infant Church which came to birth through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. You are being called to the priestly ministry in today's Church, with its long history, its settled teachings and developed tradition, the tragic story of its failures, but also the rich heritage of its extraordinary service to humanity in imitation of its Master. Do not long for the Church of the past, do not believe you are called to refashion some new kind of Church of the future. Rather, seek to help the Lord's Church today to be more faithful, more fruitful, more in reality what it already is in its theology. You will do this if, like the one to whom you will be united in a new and powerful way tonight, you are really alive to the needs of the people of today to whom you are sent, people who in many ways are harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd, just like the people of Jesus's time and place. Set yourself to care for them, set yourself to teach them (cf Matt 9:36). To use Pope Francis's famous phrase, make sure you smell of the sheep, not of some pampered palace.

You are then called to be priests, living signs of the presence of Jesus among his people as their Good Shepherd, in the concrete realities of today's world and today's Church. You will need to grow in your understanding of the people to whom you are sent and of whom you are and always will remain a part; grow in your appreciation of their gifts, in your compassion for their struggles, and in the gentle loving-kindness with which you encounter them. You are called to this because



this is the way Jesus was and you are his disciples, his servants, his ministers. You are called to ensure that you do not break the bruised reed or snuff out the wavering flame of faith (cf Matt 12:20). You are called to this because this is the way Jesus was and you are his disciples, his servants, his ministers. You will, in harmony with our long-standing tradition, be called “Father”: remember that your fatherhood should be like that of the father in Jesus’s parable of the Prodigal Son: never judgmental or condemnatory, always respectful of his adult children and their dignity, always seeking to persuade, to appeal to what is best in a person, and to be ready with open arms and a large-hearted generosity to welcome people home at the very first opportunity.

In reflecting on Jesus, the source and inspiration of every ministry in the Church, it will be important too, though confronting, to remember that almost without exception the only people to whom Jesus speaks harshly in the gospels are the religious leaders of his day, who “laid burdens on people’s shoulders and did nothing to lift them” (cf Matt 23:4), and his closest and most trusted disciples, who so often failed to understand him (cf Jn 14:9), to truly know him.

Saint John Bosco, one of the great models of the ordained priesthood, and especially of ministry to and for young people, was told by his mother on the eve of his priestly ordination, “*John, remember that to begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer*”. What sounds like a bleak warning is really a promise that a faithful priest will share fully in the experience of his Lord. Liam, Mark and Matteo, the words of John Bosco’s mother were borne out in his life as a priest and they will be borne out in yours as well. When in a few moments’ time I present to you the gifts for the Eucharist I will say these words to you:

*Receive the oblation of the Holy People to be offered to God: understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord’s cross.*

A little later in tonight’s liturgy, you will, for the first time, join me and your brother priests in reciting the words of consecration:

*This is my body given up for you. This is my blood poured out for you. Do this in memory of me.*

Every time you stand at the altar you will do this in memory of Jesus. But what you do at the altar you must also do with your life. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, prefigured in the Last Supper, was the final moment in a life which was totally given over in love to God and to and for God’s people. It was because of love that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. It was love that informed everything Jesus said and did for us during his life. It was because of love that Jesus went to the cross and through the cross to the fullness of life which he shares with us. In every sense and in every way it was the self-sacrificing love of Christ which saved us - and as an ordained priest within the Lord’s Church it is this same self-sacrificing love which you are called to embody in your life and ministry, so that the love of God can be seen, and touched, and experienced by God’s holy people.

What Saint Augustine said to his people of himself as a bishop you must be able to say to your people of yourself: *For you I am a priest, but with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty, the latter a grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation.* May your realisation of yourself as a graced person, brought to life in Christ and joined to the community of disciples through



baptism, help you to live your ministerial priesthood in humility, in service, and in communion with all your brothers and sisters in the faith.