



Ordination to the Priesthood - Rev Grzegorz Rapcewicz

Homily

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

**Friday 12 August, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

The great commission of Jesus which concludes the gospel of Saint Matthew continues to ring out in the Church today: *go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:16-20).*

These words are recorded as the final words spoken by Jesus to the eleven disciples, who had, at his instructions, gathered together with him on the mountain, as he brought the Paschal mystery to its conclusion. All that remained was for Jesus to return to his Father carrying our humanity with him to find its rightful place in heaven. It was to be from heaven that the Father and the Son would send the Holy Spirit upon the infant Church gathered in prayer. The long journey of the Church through history had begun.

As is so often the case when Jesus speaks to his disciples, this great commission was received from Jesus by them on behalf of the whole Church. Saint Matthew's Gospel makes this point by first naming the eleven as *disciples* rather than as *apostles* and then having them sent to make other disciples who would, precisely as disciples, share in this great task. The vocation to go, to make disciples, to teach, and to obey, belongs to every Christian. And this realisation invites us to remember the words we find in the First Letter of Saint Peter, who speaks not just to Church leaders but to a community of disciples: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his own wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).*

Pope Francis expresses these important insights in the New Testament when, in speaking of the Church's vocation, he tells us: *I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse, capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.*

We have gathered in the Cathedral this evening to share in this extraordinary celebration, in and through which God will take hold of Grzegorz in a new and powerful way and enable him, through the grace of the Sacrament of Orders, to be a living sign and instrument of Christ's ongoing presence among his people as their Good Shepherd. As we do so it is important for Grzegorz,



and for all of us, to remember that he is being ordained not to be, as the Letter of Saint Peter puts it, a dictator over the flock entrusted to his care, but rather to be a humble servant, **as Jesus was**, giving his life so that others might have life, **as Jesus did**.

From tonight onwards Grzegorz will be numbered among those who are called to be shepherds of God's people. But he is not called to care for a flock of unruly and skittish sheep who need to be controlled. Rather he is called and sent to care for a chosen race and a royal priesthood, people endowed with great dignity through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit within them, and through their growing conformity to the Christ who lives within them. He will be at the service of a holy people. And if it is true that sometimes this holy people may be harassed and dejected, a little like sheep without a shepherd (cf Matthew 9:36), then at those times it will be especially important that it is the presence of the Good Shepherd that Grzegorz brings alive through his life and ministry.

Pope Saint John Paul II once summed all of this up by saying that the ministerial priesthood, which is entrusted to Grzegorz tonight, exists in the Church to be at the service of, and to enable the exercise of, the priesthood of the whole Church.

It is important for Grzegorz, and for us, to understand what it means to be a priestly people. This is at the heart of the common vocation we all share and for that very reason it is at the heart of the vocation to the ministerial priesthood through which Christ enables the Church to live this vocation fruitfully. And why? Because it is at the heart of the life and ministry of Jesus himself.

I said a moment ago that Grzegorz is being called to **be** what Jesus was and to **do** what Jesus did. In the end it all comes down to the cross. Jesus gave his life for us – he sacrificed his life for us – not just on the cross, though fully and finally there, but in every moment of every day of his life, and he asks us to do the very same thing in memory of him. These are the very words which, for the first time tonight as a priest, Grzegorz will pronounce at the consecration. *This is my body, given for you. This is my blood poured out for you. Do this in memory of me.* Jesus was and is our great High Priest because he was ready to give everything he was and had, to sacrifice everything he was and had, for us. We as his disciples, his holy priestly people, are called to give, to sacrifice, everything we are and everything we have, for the Lord and for his people. And because, as we know only too well, it is impossible for us to live this way fully and faithfully relying on our own strength, the Lord is calling Grzegorz, as he calls all his priests and bishops, to be the grace-filled instruments through which the Lord, without whom we can do nothing, continues to be among us as our Good, life-giving, compassionate and selfless Shepherd enabling us to be, in him, what we can never be, left to ourselves.. Grzegorz will do all this unfailingly through the sacraments he celebrates with us and for us, God's people. He will also do it, if he fully opens his heart to the grace he receives tonight, in every encounter he has with us. But Grzegorz, it will depend so much on your renewing each day your commitment to **be** what Jesus was for his people and to **do** what Jesus did for his people.



This is our prayer for you tonight: that God, who in his mysterious ways has begun this good work in you, will bring it to fulfilment, for his glory and for the good of his holy, priestly people.