



**Ordination to the Diaconate
Br Sheldon Burke CRS**

Homily

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

**Saturday 10 December, 2022
Sacred Heart Church, Thornlie**

As we gather this morning for this beautiful celebration, we are doing so on the eve of the Third Sunday of Advent and just two days after the solemn celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady who is, of course, under this title, the patroness of our Archdiocese and of our Cathedral. We stand, then, in that liturgical space between the two great figures of Advent: Mary, the Mother of the Lord, and John the Baptist, the one who, as tomorrow's gospel will remind us, was sent to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. As we reflect on these two people, who were so deeply drawn into the mystery we are soon to celebrate at Christmas, it seems to me that the coming together of these two liturgical realities provides us with a wonderful context in which to celebrate Brother Sheldon's ordination to the diaconate. The gospel accounts of both Mary and John, in quite different contexts, are stories of new beginnings, of profound generosity in response to God's call, and of a willing acceptance of a future they were unable to determine or control and which brought great suffering to both. Brother Sheldon finds himself in the very same situation this morning as, through the powerful work of God's Spirit, he is drawn into the mystery of the ordained ministry within the Church. I would like to invite you all, therefore, to reflect with me on what this celebration of the Mother of the Lord, and the unfolding of the season of Advent, might offer all of us and, of course, you Brother Sheldon in particular, as we open ourselves to the mystery of God's presence at work within each one of us.

Advent is, as we all know, a time of waiting, of expectation. We might say that it is a time for reaching deep into our hearts, seeking to read there our deepest desires, and allowing them to rise to the surface so that we might know what it is for which we are really waiting as we look for the coming of the Lord into our lives anew and as we seek to ready ourselves for that coming.

For Brother Sheldon this morning, this Advent time of waiting and hope must have special meaning. You have for a long time, Sheldon, been engaged in the reading of your own heart, trying to trace the pattern of the Lord's presence and action in your life, and trying, too, to allow the Lord to shape within you a heart which is more and more ready and able to respond to his call. Today the Lord is calling to you in a new and special way, asking you once again, as he did at the time of your first discernment of your vocation, at the time of your novitiate and your first profession of vows, and at the time of your final commitment to the Somascan way of life at your solemn profession, to respond from the depths of your



heart to his invitation. "Come," he is saying to you, "so that I might fill your life and send you, as I once sent Saint Jerome Emiliani, especially to the young and the poor".

You have, of course, not travelled this journey alone. You have been accompanied by your family, by your friends, by your brother Somascans and by the many other people who have so far been a part of your journey. Today is a time for you, and really for all of us, to thank God for the wonderful people who have been a part of your life, and of our lives, and who have taught us to listen to the Lord's voice along the way.

Because you are setting out on your life as a sharer in the ordained ministry in the Lord's Church during the season of Advent, I encourage you to allow your life and ministry, now as a deacon and later as a priest, to always retain something of an Advent flavour. Like Saint John the Baptist, see yourself as one who is called to prepare the way for the Lord's coming in people's lives. This is, I think, a special gift which deacons, priests and bishops are called to offer in a particular way. If God has created in each person a secret place in his or her heart which only God himself can fill, it is the privilege of those who are called to ordained ministry to be among those whom God sends to his people to awaken in them the realization of this deep longing. And so, like John the Baptist, you are asked to reach out to God's people, knowing that he, the Christ, must grow greater in their lives while you, in humility, must grow smaller. Make it your goal each day, in whatever ways you can, to constantly say to everyone you meet, not only with your words but also and especially with your actions, "*Look, there is the Lamb of God. Follow him.*"

To do this you will need to be a man of faith and a man of courage. God has already asked much of you and he will continue to do so in the years ahead. At times you will wonder if you are up to the challenge. At times you will think that God asks too much. At such times I encourage you to entrust yourself to the prayers of Mary, the mother of the Lord, whom we here in Australia have learnt to call the *Help of Christians*. As a Somascan you have learnt to call her "*Mother of Orphans*" and as members of the universal Catholic community we have all learnt to call her the *Mother of the Church*. She is the great woman of Advent who can show us what it means to welcome the Lord into our lives. She knew what it was to be afraid and unsure in the face of what God was asking of her. But she also knew what it was to entrust herself to God. "*I am the servant of the Lord,*" she said to the angel Gabriel. "*Let what you have said be done to me.*" Today, Sheldon, the Lord is asking you to make the same act of faith - the same gift of yourself to him. As you are ordained as a deacon - ordained for a ministry of service - the Lord is waiting to hear from your lips, as he heard from Mary's lips, the same words: *I am the Lord's servant. Let his will be done in me.*

Mary was able to say these words not because she knew herself to be particularly talented, particularly well-suited to the task, or particularly gifted - although of course she had been prepared for her role by God's special gifts of grace. This, in fact, is what we celebrated in the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Mary was able to say "yes" to God's call because she allowed herself to believe the angel's words: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will cover you with its shadow.*" Brother Sheldon, your ordination today holds the same promise. Through the laying on of



hands and the prayer of faith you too will be covered by God's shadow, strengthened and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and shaped into a living image of the Christ who came not to be served but to serve. Like Mary, open your heart to this gift. Like her reflect often and deeply on all that God is doing in your life. Like her treasure it all in your heart. Your openness, your constant reflection, and your treasuring of God's presence in your life will enable you to be faithful, as Mary was.

Lastly, Brother Sheldon, as you step forward now to receive this wonderful gift of ordination, know that you do so supported by the prayers of your family, your Somascan brothers from around the world, the clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Perth and by all of us gathered in this Church today. May God bless you and keep you as you become for us now a living sign of the Lord's presence among us as the one who serves.