



Ordination to the Diaconate – Nicholas Diedler

Homily

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

**Saturday 12 March, 2022
Banksia Grove Parish**

The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is – of communion with God and of unity among all people (Lumen Gentium 1).

With these words the bishops who had gathered in Rome for the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s introduced the document *Lumen Gentium*, one of only two Dogmatic Constitutions among the sixteen documents which together set out a vision for the Church's faith and mission in our contemporary world. The Council which produced those documents remains, as all the Popes of modern times have insisted, the fundamental blueprint for the Church's ongoing fidelity to her Lord. He, of course, is the one who, in tonight's gospel, is transfigured in glory but who then immediately finds himself, with his three closest disciples, back among the crowds, teaching and healing, as he makes his way to Jerusalem, where he will be put to death. It is not glory, and certainly not the way the world understands glory, which is at the heart of the life and ministry of Jesus; rather it is generous and constant self-sacrifice for the good of others.

It is within this sacramental Church – the Lord's Church – that Nicholas tonight receives the sacrament of ordination as a deacon. The Sacrament of Orders, which itself has three concrete expressions in the life of the Church – deacons, priests and bishops – shares in the sacramental identity of the whole Church as **the great** sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people. And for this very reason it is important to say immediately that ordination as a deacon does not set a man apart from the community of disciples. On the contrary, it inserts the man much more deeply into the community of disciples because it bestows on the man the grace, and the responsibility, of making his whole life, in every dimension, a total gift to God for the sake of God's people. He is, in a sense, a living sacrament in the Holy People of God which is also a living sacrament.

It is not easy to commit oneself publicly, totally and unreservedly to God in this way and we should be in awe of the courage Nicholas is showing in offering himself to the Lord and his people. But even more, I believe, we should be in awe of the overwhelming power of God's grace, for it is this which has enabled Nicolas to say "yes" to the Lord's invitation and it will be this which will enable Nicholas, if he remains open to God's grace, to be faithful to the commitments which he makes tonight.



And what are those commitments? The liturgy itself makes them clear. In the questions which I will put to Nicholas before I ordain him I will ask about his willingness to fulfil his duties with humble charity; to remain faithful to the mystery of our faith, as it is believed in and practiced in our Catholic tradition; to live a life of celibacy as a sign of his dedication to the Lord; to be a man of prayer, and faithful to the daily Office, the Prayer of the Church; to conform his very way of life to the example of Christ; and to show respect and give obedience to his bishop.

It is important for Nicholas, and for all of us, to understand that these various commitments, or obligations, are not isolated items to be checked off as if they were a shopping list or a set of key performance indicators to be achieved. Rather they are particular and interrelated dimensions of a much more fundamental reality: to be, in the Lord's sacramental Church, a living sacrament, that is both a sign and an instrument, of the presence of Jesus Christ among his people **as their servant**. From tonight onwards this will be Nicholas's role and responsibility and one he takes on in the name of the Church and as a representative of the Church: to do everything he can to ensure that in every encounter people have with him they will be encountering the humble, gentle, compassionate and self-sacrificing *Son of Man (who) came not to be served but to serve* (Mark 10:45 et al).

I hope that as I say these words, and as our liturgy unfolds, Nicholas, and indeed all of us, are overawed and overwhelmed by what is happening, much as Peter, James and John were overwhelmed as the Lord was transfigured before them. We might not see the Lord's presence tonight with the clarity that the three chosen disciples did on the mountain, but with the eyes of faith we can see that the Lord is working a miracle of transformation this evening. As I lay my hands on Nicholas's head and pray the prayer of Consecration, it is the Holy Spirit who is descending onto and into Nicholas and re-making him in such a way as to enable him to be, indeed, the sacramental sign of the presence of Jesus the servant among us. For this is a task beyond our human capacity. It is only through the transforming power of God that it becomes possible. And yet, this grace remains always a gift and never a cancellation of our freedom. From tonight onwards Nicholas will bear the heavy responsibility of opening his mind and his heart more and more to the wonder and the immensity of this gift – for it is always possible to leave a gift, including and perhaps especially the gifts of grace, unused and unproductive.

When the bishops at the Second Vatican Council spoke of the Church as a sacrament they insisted that it was only so "*in Christ*". Nicholas will be faithful to his vocation as a deacon only if he is and remains, and becomes more and more, a man who lives in Christ and for Christ. Saint Paul once said to the Christians in Corinth, *Be imitators of me as I am of Christ*. (1 Cor 11:1). Every ordained minister should want to be able to say the same. But we must be sure that it is the true Christ, and not a Christ we have constructed for ourselves, whom we are imitating. As a deacon Nicholas is called to model himself only on Christ: not on me as the bishop, or on other ordained ministers in the diocese, or on anyone else, or at least not unless Christ shines through them so clearly that we recognize them as true and faithful disciples. For Nicholas then, as for all ministers of the Gospel, our guide and model must be the one we encounter and grow to know and love in the pages of the gospel, as that gospel is preached and taught in our Catholic tradition: no-one else, only Christ.



And lastly, let me remind us all of this. Ordained ministers are given to the Church by God as enablers of the fundamental vocation of the Church and all its members. That vocation is expressed in these words from the First Letter of Saint Peter: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light* (1 Peter 2:9). This is who we are as the community of disciples, the Church. It will be your duty, Nicholas, and your privilege, to put yourself humbly and generously at our service and help us, in all our diversity and with all our strengths and weaknesses, to live in fidelity to this call.

Perhaps Saint John the Baptist expressed all this better than anyone else when he said of Jesus: *he must grow greater and I must grow smaller* (John 3:30). It is my prayer, Nicholas, that you take this as your motto tonight and live it out faithfully each day.