



**Ordination to the Priesthood  
Salesian Community Clifton Hill**

***Rev Deacon Kevin Fiame  
Rev Deacon Eteuati Milo  
Rev Deacon Jeff Miller  
Rev Deacon Ngoc Duc Tran  
Rev Deacon Viet Huong Vu (Joseph)***

**Homily**

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

**Saturday 28 January, 2023  
St Francis Church, Melbourne**

We have gathered here in St Francis Church this afternoon, at the very beginning of the centenary of the arrival of the Salesians in Australia, to celebrate an event which will create ripples not only across this land but across the much wider region of East Asia and Oceania. The ordination to the priesthood of five young Salesians, one from Australia, two from Samoa and two from Vietnam, is a source of joy and hope for these three countries, and indeed perhaps much more widely. After all, there is no telling what a provincial might decide to do with young and energetic priests. Who knows where they might be sent and what they might be asked to do! As we pray now for Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati, we ask the Lord that the gift of the ordained priesthood which they receive today will bear fruit in every place they live and work and in every life they touch.

We also pray in gratitude that each of these young men has found the courage to listen deeply to the voice of the Lord working in their lives and to respond generously to that voice. This courage and faith led them into the Salesian novitiate, strengthened them to dedicate their lives to God and to his people, especially the young, through their religious profession, and sustained them through the challenges and difficulties which are a part of every person's life, and therefore of the life of every religious. And now, this same faith and courage have guided them to this moment in which, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, they will be molded into living images of Christ among his people, and especially among the young, as their Good Shepherd.

Those of you who know these fine young men well will be aware, I am sure, that each of them has travelled his own unique journey of life and of faith. Because of this, they are for us today an invitation to reflect on the mysterious ways of God who has been at work not only in their lives but in our lives as well. Although I have not had time to get to know them well, each of them did write to me sharing something of their story. In reading these stories I was struck by the different



backgrounds and experiences which have led each of these men here this afternoon. But equally I was struck by something common to them all: each of them had recognised, deep within himself, a stirring of his heart which seemed to be saying to him, in one way or another, “If I am going to be the man God has created me to be, and the man who, deep down, I know I want to be, this is the choice I must make, and I make it willingly”.

This stirring in the heart is a precious gift from God and it gives rise to something which one of the psalms captures beautifully: it is the impulse to gratitude.

*How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?*

(one of the psalmist writes)

*The cup of salvation I will raise: I will call on the Lord's name.*

*My vows to the Lord I will fulfill before all his people.*

*How precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful.*

How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me? This is a question for all of us, and in a special way this afternoon for Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati. How can we repay the Lord for his goodness to us? How can we show how grateful we are? How can we let the Lord know that we recognize how blessed we are and that we owe everything to God? The psalm, of course, does not only pose the question: it also proposes an answer – and it is one I would offer to our five ordinands today. After all, priestly ordination is not a gift that we deserve, or a prize that we have earned. It is a freely given grace of God offered, in God's mysterious plan, to broken and fragile men whom God asks to be living signs that he continues to guide and shepherd his people – and none of us are worthy of this!

The first thing the psalm suggests is that we raise the cup of salvation. The psalm was composed long before the time of Christ, but as we read and pray these words as Christians, how can we not think of the Eucharist? It is the very heart of our lives as disciples of Jesus, it is an essential part of the daily pattern of life for every Salesian, and from today onwards it will be at the centre of the lives of our young ordinands. This afternoon, Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati, for the first time, together with me and your brother priests, you will celebrate the Eucharist as ordained priests and fulfill the command given by Jesus to his first disciples at the Last Supper. “*Do this in memory of Me.*” This doing, this “memoring” must not be something you only do at the altar in the Church. You must also **do** and **remember** on the altar of people's lives – for we are called to be ready to have our bodies broken and our blood spilt for the lives of others, as Jesus did for the life of the world. This is what we must do, in memory of him, if our daily celebration of the Eucharist is to be more than mere ritual. Both through your sacramental ministry, and through the quality of your Salesian presence in the lives of others, especially the young, you must be signs and bearers of God's love.

The psalmist goes on to insist that we must call on the Lord's name. This is true for every Christian and therefore for every priest. But we will only do this, genuinely and sincerely, if we recognise that we need him; that without him we can do nothing. Reflection on the image of the Good



Shepherd from today's gospel, if we take it seriously and understand the life and ministry of priests as a special sharing in Jesus' shepherding of his people, will convince us of our need to rely on the Lord's strength and patience, his compassion and large-heartedness, rather than on our own. We will both need to and want to call on his name if we are to be the ministers of the Gospel he has chosen us to be.

The next words of the psalmist will speak directly to the hearts of our five young Salesians: *"My vows to the Lord I will fulfill before all his people."* This afternoon, Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati, you are ordained as priests and you will live that priesthood as members of the Salesian Congregation. Never allow your priesthood to overshadow or obscure your identity as a Salesian. The special gift you have already been given, and which is in a remarkable way deepened this afternoon, is the gift of the religious life, lived through the spirit and charism of Don Bosco. The significance of your religious life as Salesians is expressed very beautifully in our constitutions – perhaps more beautifully than in many other places: *In a world tempted by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possessions and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely, and that the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour* (C 62). This afternoon I would encourage each of you, then, to make the daily living of your vowed life, as a witness to the power of Christ to fill our lives completely, the distinguishing mark of your priesthood, just as it was the distinguishing mark of Don Bosco's priesthood.

The last thing the psalmist says in the small passage we are reflecting on is not another instruction about repaying God for his goodness. Rather it is something of a summary of all that has come before: *How precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful.*

To be ordained a priest is a kind of death (or as Don Bosco's mother said to him at the time of his ordination, *"To begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer"*). For Christians, of course, death is the gateway to life. From today onwards, our five young men will be called to renew and deepen even more than before the total gift of themselves to God which they made at their first profession. Today, the Lord is asking them let go of everything holding them back from giving themselves fully and finally to God; to surrender themselves to God and allow God to remake them, to reshape them, into something, or rather someone, new. Today, God's grace is at work within them, molding them into living images of Jesus the Good Shepherd. How else would they be able to do what Jesus calls his ministers to do: to feed his lambs and his sheep? This is what shepherds do – this is what Jesus does - and today, Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati, he is telling you that from now on, in a new and powerful way, he intends to do all this through you.

This is a daunting task and it is one which is beyond any of us, if we rely simply on ourselves. It is only with the support of our brothers and sisters in the faith, and of course with the never-failing grace of God, that we can hope to respond to all that God is asking of us. Confident in that grace, and in God's fidelity, I invite you now, Joseph, Jeff, Kevin, Peter and Eteuati to open yourselves



to the transforming power of God's Spirit and to the gift of priestly ordination which God now offers you. And know that you are accompanied by our prayers as you take this important step.