



**Ordination to the Priesthood
Rev Deacon Nicholas Diedler**

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 24 March 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

What does it mean to be a Catholic Priest in the Lord's Church today?

This is a dangerous question to ask at the beginning of a homily, because it is one which cannot be answered in seven or eight minutes or, if the preacher is particularly brave, in even 15 or 20 minutes.

Nevertheless, I want to put the question to all of us this evening, for we are witnessing a momentous event in the life of one young man, Nicholas Diedler, as he steps forward with faith, with courage, and I hope also with trepidation, to receive through the ministry of God's Church the grace of priestly ordination.

Of course, even in these few words of introduction, something absolutely essential is being said. What is happening here in the cathedral tonight is God's doing and not ours. It is God who has given us the gift of the ordained ministry as an indispensable ministry of service to God's holy people. It is God who has stepped into Nicholas's life, forming and shaping him for what is about to take place in his life this evening. And it is God, in the mystery of his providence, who has given Nicholas the grace he needs, and the people he needs, to help him say *yes* to the Lord who calls. Tonight, I hope and pray that the question of the psalmist - *how can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?*- is both on Nicholas's lips and in his heart.

These words, of course, are not just for Nicholas. All of us here in the Cathedral this evening, or watching this celebration online, are being invited to recognise with gratitude that we are witnesses to a powerful work of God who through the signs and symbols of the sacrament of ordination will equip Nicholas with all that he needs to live the life of gentle, humble, self-effacing sacrifice to which God has called him. And, indeed, it is not just Nicholas who should be grateful for the gift he receives tonight. All of us should be grateful for the gift which Nicholas, if he remains faithful, will be to all of us, and to the whole Church of God in this archdiocese.

Gentle, humble, sacrificial self-giving: these are words which inevitably turn our minds to Jesus. He once described himself in exactly this way - as *gentle and humble of heart*, and as one who comes among us *not to be served, but to serve*; and this, surely, is precisely what being self-effacing means.



Someone once remarked to me that in my preaching and teaching, I am always speaking about Jesus, and therefore, in their opinion, not enough about other dimensions of our Catholic faith. Because as Christians we are called to listen to each other with open hearts, I have thought often about this, and recognise that there is something here to which I must pay attention. And yet, tonight I make no apologies for focusing on the Lord Jesus. In directing not just Nicholas but all of us to Jesus I am simply reminding us, as Saint Paul reminded the Christian community in Philippi, that at the very heart of our vocation as Christian disciples is the call *to have in us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus*.

If this is a challenge for every Christian, so much more is it a challenge for our ordained ministers - for our deacons, priests, and bishops. And tonight, Nicholas takes on this challenge in a very real and personal way.

What does it mean for a priest- and what will it now mean for Nicholas - to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus? It means that a priest, that Nicholas, must realise and make real each day that he is being called not to do his own will, but the will of the One who sent him. Part of this, of course, will be his generous and wholehearted embrace of his promise of respect and obedience to his bishop. But it is more than that: ultimately it is obedience to God himself in all the ways he makes his will known.

Obedience can often be easy enough, but sometimes it can be very difficult. Modelling himself on the Lord who has called him, the priest, Nicholas, will remember that Jesus became obedient, *even unto death, death on the cross*. Obedience may sometimes call a priest to “*die to himself*” – and it will be hard.

A priest who is truly seeking to have in himself the same mind that was in Christ Jesus will remember how often Jesus withdrew by himself to spend long hours in prayer. The faithful priest will not allow himself to be so consumed by activity that he loses the capacity for reflection, and for that *pondering in the heart*, which made Mary the first and best disciple of her son. At the same time, a priest with the mind of Jesus will, even if he is tired and in need of rest, respond to those who seek him out, recognising that they are often *harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd*.

The priest who has the mind of Jesus will be ready to forgive, warmly and generously, *not seven times but seventy times seven*, even when people *persecute him, abuse him and speak all kinds of evil against him*. He will be very slow to condemn, very slow to judge, always ready to speak words of encouragement and hope, and especially when he must speak words which people may find challenging or hard to accept.

In the end, a priest who has the mind of Jesus will offer himself - all that he is, and all that he has - as a generous gift of self-sacrificing love for the people to whom he is sent, just as Jesus, gathered with his disciples, foreshadowed his death by breaking the bread which was his body, and pouring out the wine which was his blood, in a total gift of himself for us.



All of this, and every other aspect of the great mystery of Jesus (for I have barely touched the surface of this mystery) is ultimately found in the Eucharist, and it is for that reason that the priest who has the mind of Jesus will be a priest who loves to celebrate the Eucharist and who seeks to celebrate it according to the mind of the Church, with reverence and humility, with dignity and simplicity. The priest who has the mind of Jesus will *celebrate* the Eucharist in order to *become* the Eucharist. He will celebrate the Eucharist in order to help his people to become the Eucharist. He will celebrate the Eucharist in order, in the words of Saint John's gospel, *to gather into one the scattered children of God*. Indeed, the priest with the mind of Jesus will remember Jesus's prayer to his Father at all his disciples might be one. The priest will both make that prayer his own, and make it the program of his daily life and ministry.

I said, at the start of this homily, that I hoped Nicholas was approaching his ordination not just with courage and faith, but also with trepidation. The Lord, through his Church, asks great things of the priest. It would be understandable if you, Nicholas, at this moment are feeling overwhelmed, and even afraid, as the enormity of all this dawns on you. I would encourage you, then, to pause with the rest of us for a moment's reflection before we proceed.

Remember that when the angel Gabriel revealed to Mary the enormity of her vocation, she too was afraid and confused. It was the words of the angel which gave her courage to say *yes*, and it was the truth of those words which enabled her to remain faithful: *the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will cover you with its shadow*. As I lay my hands on your head, and the other priests join me in doing the same, be aware that the power of God does indeed, overshadow you. As I pray the Prayer of Consecration be aware that the Holy Spirit comes upon you. As the naming of the saints rolls over you as we sing the litany, and as I offer you the gift of peace and your brother priests do the same, be conscious that you are not alone. And when you stand at the altar with me to celebrate the Eucharist for the first time, see the Church of God, your family, friends, parishioners and sisters and brothers in the faith gathered here in this place, and know that you will be carried by the prayer, the support the understanding and the encouragement of God's holy people.