



## **Ordination to the Diaconate of Neville Connell**

### **Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross (OLSC)**

#### **Homily**

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton  
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

Our Lady of the Missions Pastoral Centre Chapel, Highgate  
Saturday 15 July, 2017

Just after Easter this year, the pilgrimage group I accompanied to the Holy Land took the road to Emmaus. It was the last excursion of our journey. This was to be the creation of yet another memory, which will be activated for me whenever the story of the two disciples who walked away from Jerusalem is told.

We were able to celebrate the Mass within the ruins of the crusader basilica. This church was built next to the ancient floor and baptismal bath of a Byzantine church, probably five hundred years older than the basilica.

There was something very special in us celebrating on the site where Jesus took the bread from the table, blessed it and breaking it gave it to his uncle Cleopas, who finally recognised him. We were breaking the bread of the Eucharist and being drawn into the presence and life of the Risen Lord, Jesus. We prayed that like the very first disciples our eyes would be always open to recognise the presence of Jesus as we walk along the roads of our lives.

This morning, this memory has surfaced as I reflect on the diaconate and its ministry for the Church. The Rite of the Ordination of a Deacon contains a homily. In it we find the sentence, "As deacons, that is, as ministers of Jesus Christ, who came among his disciples as one who served, do the will of God from the heart: serve the people in love and joy as you would the Lord".

It seemed to me at Emmaus that the Lord continued to serve his people after his resurrection, represented by the two as they walked away and Jesus coming alongside of them, walking with them, engaging in their conversation about the meaning of his death, as they tried to make sense of the stories of appearances of Jesus to some disciples.

Neville is being called, through the Ordination to the Diaconate today, to minister for Jesus whenever he himself draws near to people, comes alongside them as they walk the ways of their lives, and engages in the sharing of faith as they talk together about their lives.

The ministry of the deacon is to teach, to assist in the sanctification of the people through the liturgy and to exercise the ministry of charity, providing for the needs of the poor and the marginalised. However, as this ordination, please God, will lead to the call to ordination and ministry of priesthood, I want to highlight an important aspect of ministry today.



Catholics are looking for spiritual guides or mentors, especially in their clergy. Our people want to find their deacons, priests and bishops are men of prayer and contemplation, who have come to know Jesus for themselves. They are looking for us to help them grow in their spiritual lives because we have been walking with the Lord, listening to him as we reflect on our lives and learning how to discern the way of being oriented to the will of God. Our people want us to be authentic guides that speak from experience.

St Gregory of Nyssa once wrote, comparing our attempts to know the ways of God to our trying to look at the sun. He advised that the only way we can look at the brilliance of the sun is through a medium that subdues its light. St Gregory had come to know God and his ways by daring to look within himself, to look for the light of God in the place that we can bare his brilliance, in the various levels of his consciousness. He had discovered the image that was placed in him by God from the beginning: the image of God himself. He taught that we will find in the inner movements of our lives the presence of God who we seek.

St Ignatius of Loyola came to the same realisation. By learning how to test his desires, moods and motivations, he came to deep peace, joy and tranquility when he allowed himself to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

The deacons, with the priests and bishops, make enormous contributions to the building up of the church by growing in the life of the Spirit and being deeply spiritual men. This aspect of our ministry is bound up in the fundamental call to be a servant to all, as Christ himself came, as one who served.

The word 'deacon' means servant, waiting-man, minister or messenger. Wikipedia advises that the word deacon has come from a word that described the dust that was raised by the busy servant or messenger.

Neville, I pray for you in this present diaconal ministry and in your future ministry. May you be known for your untiring effort to serve the people of God and those in our society who are searching for truth and meaning. May you experience the grace of God as you teach and journey with others, engaging in the stories of their lives. And may you be a man of the Spirit of Goodness, a true witness to the love of the Father and a consolation to the people who are seeking to know God.