



Mass for the Institution of Acolytes

Homily

**By the Most Rev Donald Sproxton DD
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Friday 9 November 2018

I came to the Cathedral as a deacon in 1977 and was ordained a priest here in December of that same year.

I think it was the following year that the then-Dean of the Cathedral, William Foley, started preparing a group of men for the acolytate. In today's context, there is nothing very revolutionary in doing that – but in those days, it was. Most of the people in the Cathedral parish didn't want acolytes; some of the priests didn't want acolytes. But he persevered, and that group of men was instituted into the ministry. Many people eventually came to Dean Foley, and thanked him for these men who had undertaken this service, and they expressed to him how so much more had been added to the life of the community because of their ministry. Practically all of them, I think, would take Communion to Royal Perth Hospital. Some would take Communion to those people in their homes who could no longer come to the Church.

One thing that alleviated some of the Sunday pressures on the Cathedral priests was that we didn't all have to come running across here to assist in the distribution of Communion at every Mass, because now we had acolytes who were extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

It really was wonderful that so many people were benefitting from their Eucharistic ministry. As time went on, those acolytes became wonderful ministers, not just of Holy Communion, but they became, in some cases, great ministers of healing – particularly for those patients that they visited in the hospital – because they would spend a little bit of time with the person, engaging in conversation. And if the person was in the hospital for a period of time, their regular visit gave great strength, great encouragement to them.

So we came to appreciate this lay ministry. Then, of course, as we know, in 1986, the ministry of taking Communion to the sick and helping with the distribution of Communion at Mass was extended to other lay extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist – lay men and women who for some time were called Special Ministers of the Eucharist.

This was the vision that Pope Paul VI had in mind of enabling more and more people to have access to the Eucharist – because really there never has been a time when there have been enough priests and deacons. Many people were being deprived of that opportunity of receiving the 'source and the strength' that they needed for their spiritual life – particularly in those moments when, through illness, they were struggling.



The men who have been presented to me this evening, therefore, are following a very important pastoral tradition in the Archdiocese of Perth, and they are to exercise a ministry in common with many who have gone before them. It is a great tradition, a great legacy, and there have been great learnings in this time in which the acolytate has been functioning in the Archdiocese. There is now a better understanding of the potential for the ministry. I am certain that the ministry of bringing Communion to the sick, and, with the Sacrament, bringing an encouraging word to the sick, has been a flowering of this ministry.

So tonight we thank the Lord for the fact that you who have said “yes” to an invitation to become an acolyte, for you have engaged in the preparation for the ministry that you will receive this evening; you have responded with generosity to the call of the Church to serve; and you are called to grow in humility, in order that you might serve the Church in ways that at this time perhaps you might be unable to understand or foresee. It is your generosity of spirit that we thank the Lord for this evening in this Eucharist.

I will pray for you, and I am sure in the times when I visit the parishes in the future, I will meet you and work with you. May we bring to the people a very important message by the way we conduct ourselves when we are celebrating the Eucharist together. The Eucharistic ministry is important, and our humble, patient and respectful way celebrating and serving sends a message to our brothers and sisters in the parishes. We are saying that we want to build up the People of God through our ministry.

So I pray for you this evening and I pray that, together, we can continue in this wonderful work of building the Body of Christ, through the witness of our loving service.