



**Ordination to the Priesthood
Rev Deacon Andres Felipe Cortes Fernandez**

Homily

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

**St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Friday 2 June 2023**

As I mentioned at the beginning of the Mass, I had the opportunity of hosting a morning tea this week where I could meet Felipe's family, his parish priest, and other members of his community, as well as those who have been helping him along the way, in his formation, and it was a very positive meeting.

It gave us all a chance to share our experiences and get to know each other before we gathered this evening, for this ordination. His family and friends spoke of the marked differences between life in Colombia and in Western Australia. They were impressed by the beauty and the organised planning of our city.

I felt it was very important to thank them for the gift of Felipe, especially as I was listening to the experiences of how his family, members of his community, and the members of his parish, have been encouraging him, particularly after he felt that call from God to be a diocesan missionary priest, and this happened following a youth pilgrimage in Colombia in 2008.

I assured them that as Felipe will be ordained for this Archdiocese, he will be a brother to us in the priesthood and we will embrace him as one of our own. Since arriving in Perth in 2012, Felipe completed a degree in Theology at Notre Dame University here in Fremantle. Then he was sent to the Aboriginal mission in Broome, and after that, served in various parishes in the city here.

I had the privilege of ordaining him a deacon last year and since then he has served in the Parish of Port Kennedy. I didn't think I would have the chance to ordain him a priest, but unfortunately, Archbishop Costelloe has come down with COVID, and that left a door open for me this evening. So, I'm very grateful that the Archbishop asked me to do this beautiful service for him on his behalf.

Very soon, Felipe will make commitments so that we can proceed to the ordination. These are both serious and challenging for Felipe, as he was reminded by Archbishop Costelloe in a letter, giving the good news that his petition for ordination had been accepted. The Archbishop



commented that, once we take on these commitments, we are called to be faithful to them, both when they are easy and when they are difficult.

Felipe you are called to be a man of prayer, a man of courage and a man of humble service to God's people, if God's will for you is to be realised. The priesthood asks of those who are called to go on a pilgrimage with God. This journey is one of discovery and learning, growth in faith, and it's lifelong. From that first moment of feeling a call, God draws close to us in a very special way. The mystery which is ourself, is gradually open to us at the same time as the mystery of God is revealed to us. This is the experience and has been the experience of people of faith. It must happen for each of us, so that we can take up the Ministry of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding.

The Gospel this evening about the fig tree which was without fruit, perhaps seems a strange passage to choose for an ordination. But let's look deeper. The image of the fig tree was often used by the prophets in the past, to represent the people of Israel. So, when Jesus went to this healthy-looking tree for something to eat and to give him nourishment and he found a tree that had no fruit. He cursed it, and it quickly withered and died overnight. This happened shortly before Jesus entered the temple and drove out the money changers and the sellers of the sacrifices which were to be made in the temple. Even though the temple was very grand, and glorious in appearance, it was failing to build up the faith of the people. After all, it was always meant to be something pointing to the future, to that time, when the Messiah, the promised one would be sent.

So, Jesus himself was the one who came, and he was the one to replace the temple. For us too, through our encounters with him, in each event of our lives, he builds a new type of temple, the community of believers. The fig tree then had become a potent image for the early Christians of what had to pass in order for Christ to draw close to us, individually and as communities. The fig tree looked good, but it failed to produce any fruit. However, Christ nourishes the priest and the people through the word of God. It is Christ, who sanctifies through the ministry of the sacraments. Christ invites us to be shepherds with him, all learning how to humbly serve like him, who came to serve and not to be served.

Felipe, your ordination this evening, reminds the bishops, the priests and the deacons of the Archdiocese, that our ministry and service is Christ's, just as the Church and its mission is Christ's. To ignore this is to miss the mark, and to get in the way of Christ. Your experience of the power of the Word of God I'm sure ensures that you will continue to listen with more and more trust to the voice of the Spirit. In turn, I pray that you will be a true guide and a model to others of the way of conversion and transformation. We pray for your ministry among us and in the other places when you will be sent on mission in the future. May you always seek to serve in love and for unity. And may what began in that first call from God, continue to grow and deepen, and be brought to fulfillment.