

## Melbourne Ordination of Priests 2017

One of the things we have used to feed our reflections these past few days has been the wounds on the Body of Christ

In his side – the dominical sacraments – priestly ministry

In his hands – the tools of the priest's trade

In his feet – those feet to carry the Good News where ever these are sent/called

These 22 – are wounded themselves. They are not perfect – you know this better than I do! They, like the rest of us, are work in progress. We are all still clay in the hands of the potter being shaped and moulded by him as we continue as his disciples. In particular gathered here this morning we are challenged to respond – as work in progress – to Paul's clarion call in Rom 12 vs1-2 ... towards a pattern of life which is responsive to the hearing of the gospel. No matter what particular charisms of the Spirit have been poured out upon us, and with no exceptions for those of us called to a particular order from the Archbishop, either up or down and you can take your pick!– all of us are to be formed and shaped in response to the hearing of the Good News. And this is a continuous action, keenly to be known and understood in the present and which must, of necessity, direct our future – both individually and as a community of faith. We are all to be formed and shaped in response to the preached and living Word of God. There is an urgency for a renewed understanding of the importance of preaching of the Word – part of the licensed ministry to be further entrusted to you ... and an essential part of the ongoing discipleship of us all is to attend to how we preach Jesus, the Word. For most of us this is not done in a pulpit; but done nonetheless it has to be and, in fact is, in our daily living as witnesses to Jesus.

One of the temptations of today's church is to engage in frenetic activity; paying urgent attention to its structure and funding, its shape and purpose, its leadership and administration – and whilst I know that it is not intended, this activity takes the place of the life of discipleship. What we have in our urgent attempts to engage in God's mission is in fact our own mission that is set on manic street and, if we are not careful, we go around in circles chasing our own tails and encouraging others to join us in what can only become a downward spiral – that, when recognised, only increases the pace and panic of the journey!

Today is the commemoration of St Catherine of Alexandria. She died on a wheel and it is from her martyrdom that we have the firework known as the Catherine wheel – it goes round and round in circles giving off sparks and contains flashes of wonder that pass in an instant and then die away to nothing! It is not the ministry of a priest to go around and round in circles causing sparks to fly! It is though part of your ministry to set others on fire that their hearts might burn within them as the scriptures are expounded and Jesus the Word becomes known. That by your preaching, following the example of St Peter on the day of Pentecost, hearers may be cut to the heart. In the narthex of St Catherine's monastery on the Sinai Peninsula there is an encaustic icon from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. It is written on a convex panel and as you walk in, greeted by this icon of Christ, the creative Word and Lord of all, it is as if the Word hits you with a right upper cut from the heavyweight boxing champion! Cut to the heart; knocked for six!

At the start of his interrogation in a little while the Archbishop will ask three questions that relate to the scriptures. But what he is not asking is that you read and study them merely to become expert commentators or exegetes or be able to find an apposite quotation for each and every occasion, still less to become overflowing repositories of proof texts.

What is important about the Scriptures is not their written-ness, which is instrumental, but the Word of God, whose instrument they are. In other words, it is their spoken-ness that matters. The Bible is not ultimately a book for the study, for analysis, speculation and even exegesis, important though all those things are. The Bible is more a matter of celebrating, listening and living. It is a book for liturgy and life. It is noteworthy that the overwhelming content and shape of our Eucharistic liturgy is scriptural. Obviously there is room for non-scriptural material as well, provided it accords with sound tradition – hymns for example, although we need to be on our guard (and I do wish people were sometimes a bit more careful about the words of what they expect congregations to sing!), and sermons too, and exposition (so long as it is not imposition) - but our fundamental conviction is that here, in our worship is to be found the Word of God; and in a variety of ways. This is why our worship is the way it is, and why there should be a reverence about our handling of it and an openness to being surprised by it.

We are all called to a pattern of life which is based on hearing and receiving the Good News of Jesus. And you, my brothers and sisters, take on new responsibilities today in connection with this. A new ministry begins today. I believe that our Church needs you and indeed calls you to a renewed obligation to preach, live and display the Good News of Jesus. In her day St Catherine was an apologist for the faith. The Emperor brought scholars to debate with her to deflect her from the faith. She argued with them and resisted, to the point of martyrdom. Today we need similar witnesses, able to engage with all opportunities to present the Good News, constructively and creatively but above all with conviction.

As if this was not enough, there are other dimensions to your new vocation. We have scratched the surface of many of them in our Retreat as we looked, not only at the marks on Jesus' body, but also at the marks of mission on his Church today. I hope my comments might be helpful for you in the coming years. However, there is one further dimension towards which I must turn.

In Chapter 10 of his gospel Matthew tells us about the instructions of Jesus to those who will engage in his mission. The verses we have this morning are a bridge into these instructions and as such have a message for us. The people were harassed and torn apart – and we think things have changed over 2000 years! Whilst the image might in some respects be a little disconnected for today, the idea of the shepherd pastoring is by no means redundant. There are many names and titles by which we can be described and there are individual preferences as to which should be used. However, there are few, if any, that better describe priestly and episcopal ministry than pastor. For it will be your duty and your joy and, therefore, your privilege to feed God's people. And, of course, you will do so with the Word of God – with Jesus himself under the form of the bread and wine offered at the Eucharist. By your hands the people will be fed.

What kind of person must a shepherd be? One that imitates the all-embracing compassion of Jesus who has given himself for all. In your priestly ministry in a very real way, as you feed his flock, you will be giving Jesus to his brothers and sisters. He who gave himself for all calls you to an awesome ministry. Associated with the feeding, of course, is the gathering in. There are many who have strayed and for all kinds of reasons. It is our

ministry to find them and gently bring them home. This is why it is essential that a priest is known as a person that can be approached, is concerned and caring and, above all, has time to give. This is not mission on manic street. And this approachability and sensitivity and awareness of time and space needs to be reflected in the ways in which you preside at the Eucharistic assembly – recollected and centred on Jesus whose feast it is and whose Body is both given and sent.

An essential dimension of pastoring in addition to seeking the stray, is to give confidence to the bewildered and the unsure – the harassed of the gospel. For this confidence we need to be assured ourselves of the direction we must take, of the end we have in view, of the destiny of the whole created order. We gather and feed the flock for a journey; a journey towards a destination and destiny for which all of humankind have been made. To be made one with the Father eternally. This is the end of mission the marks of which need to be displayed in our common life. It is a destiny won for us all by the wounds and dying of Jesus on the cross. It is the fruit of this sacrifice – the body broken and the blood out-poured – that through you feeds God's people and by which they become what they are called to be – the Body of Christ, in and for the world.

My friends, if I may call you that – and those friends and families of yours here gathered – first, thank you for making them who they are today – please pray for them that their feet – like their Lord's, wounded as they are might be beautiful on the mountains, precisely because they are those of a messenger of Good News. Pray that their hands, scarred as they are like their Lord's might be used to care and feed and that their hearts ... well, that they might be laid bare, broken and healed and known to be both the seat of and beating for, their Lord and Master. For him who has called them and will equip them for all that is necessary.