



## **2016 Chrism Mass Homily**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
Tuesday, 22 March 2016

It is just a little over two weeks ago that so many of us here this evening gathered in this same Cathedral to celebrate the ordination of five new priests for our Archdiocese. They are here with us tonight and, in welcoming all of you, brother priests, to this celebration, I want to welcome our newest brothers in a special way. Truc, David, Matthew, Giovanni and Rodrigo are a gift to us all and we thank the Lord for them.

We also promise to continue our prayerful support for them, asking the Lord that He might bring to fulfilment the good work He has begun in them. We ask them to pray also for us, their brothers, that the Lord will continue to shape us, and them, into the priests He is calling us to be and His people need us to be.

We know that the gift of the ordained priesthood is conferred on us through the laying on of hands by the bishop and through the bishop's praying of the prayer of consecration. This gesture and this prayer have their origins in apostolic times and remind us that, through ordination, we enter a brotherhood, a communion, which comes to us from the apostles and, ultimately, from the Lord Himself. We are inheritors of the great tradition of faith, with all its beauty, its challenge and its complexity, and we are ordained to be its servants. We receive it in the earthen vessels of our own fragile humanity but we also receive it as men who are re-moulded by the power of God's grace to be living images of the ongoing presence of the Lord among His people as their Good Shepherd.

This re-moulding and reshaping is the Lord's gift to us but, precisely as a gift, it must be received and welcomed by us with generous and open hearts. One of the things we do tonight, not just we priests but the whole Church gathered both symbolically and concretely here in the Cathedral for this celebration, is to thank God for the ways in which, through His grace, so many of us have grown and continue to grow into the mystery and the beauty and the challenge of living our priesthood faithfully, joyfully and generously. That we are signs and bearers of God's love for and presence among His people is not a source of pride for us but a source of deep gratitude to God for His unfailing mercy, compassion and healing presence within us.

This wonderful gift of ordained priesthood, conferred through the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration, is then symbolised in the ordination rite by a number of other things, including the anointing of the new priest's hands. The Oil of Chrism which is consecrated during our Mass this evening is used for this anointing. The same oil, of course, is also used during Confirmation and during the celebration of our Baptism. In this way, the Church gives powerful expression to the centrality of the Sacraments of Initiation without which the ordained ministry makes no sense. The whole people of God, which we know includes all of us here in the Cathedral now, are,



through Baptism and Confirmation, consecrated as a priestly people, called to live out this priesthood by making our lives a sacrifice of generous love for others, just as Jesus made His life a sacrifice of love for us, even to the point of death.

The whole history of humanity, in all its variety of religious manifestations, teaches us that priesthood is inseparable from sacrifice. What the priesthood of Jesus, in which we all share, reveals to us is that the one real sacrifice pleasing to God is the sacrifice we make of ourselves in generous love for God and for God's people, in imitation of Jesus. As St Paul reminds us in the letter to the Romans, we should offer our very selves to God, our living bodies, as a holy sacrifice truly pleasing to God (cf Rom 12:1). St Paul does not say this to the leaders and ministers of the Church - he says it to everyone who is and wants to be a part of the community of disciples. This is what God is calling us to and this will be the measure of our response to Him. Christian priesthood is not just lived out in the liturgy: it is lived out in the concrete, often mundane, and always challenging, reality of our daily lives.

Ordained priests, together with the bishops and the deacons, are those who are called, and empowered, to be the servants of this universal vocation to priestly living, to consecrated discipleship. Never the masters, for, as Christians, we have only one Master, but always the servants in imitation of the one who came not to be served but to serve (cf Matt 20:28): never a dictator, as the first letter of St Peter reminds us, but rather an example that the whole flock can follow (cf 1 Peter 5:3). This is our privilege as ordained priests; it is our duty and, to the extent that we are faithful, it will be the joy of the whole People of God.

In celebrating the gift of the ordained priesthood tonight, therefore, we are not really singling out a particular group: rather, we are celebrating ourselves as a Church, a priestly people, and rejoicing because, with a brother's love, the Lord chooses men from among our number, shapes and moulds them into the likeness of His own servant priesthood, and then returns them to us to be our servants who will journey with us and keep alive for us the Lord's presence as our Good Shepherd, the healer of our souls and our strength and nourishment along the way. As they give their lives to us, may they find in us the support, encouragement and love without which they, too, may sometimes lose their way. May we all, together, become more and more that community of faith which will cause people to say of us, "*See how they love one another*".