



Homily – Ordination to the Priesthood

*Giovanni Raffaele, Truc Jerome Nguyen, Matthew Hodgson, David Ramirez Nieves
& Rodrigo Da Costa Ponte*

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.

As I looked at the readings chosen for this evening's ordination, these words of St Paul struck me very forcibly. They are words I would like to reflect on with you now as we find ourselves in the midst of this solemn and mysterious liturgy: solemn because of the nature of the setting, the make-up of the congregation and the complex and beautiful stories which have brought these five young men to this important moment in their lives; and mysterious because of what we believe God is doing within the depths of each of these men through our liturgy and in answer to our prayers.

We hold this treasure in earthenware jars. The treasure, first and foremost, is our faith. We are all here this evening because, in different ways, God has touched us, planted within us the gift of faith, and caused it to grow within us to the point where we now find ourselves rejoicing with these men - Matthew, Rodrigo, Truc, Giovanni and David – who, from among our own number, God has chosen and called to the priesthood. But this gift of faith is delicate and fragile, held as it is within our own hearts. We are, at one and the same time, people who are and want to be people of faith, really trusting in the Lord's presence in our lives, and yet also people who are so easily lured away from our faith by so many other things which can push God aside. One of the reasons for our joy tonight is the fact that, in the words of the prayer of consecration I will shortly pray over these men, we are weak and our need is great and for that reason God gives us these men to walk with us. They will remind us of God's loving presence in our lives through their preaching and teaching; they will bring to us God's compassionate mercy in the sacraments, especially in the Sacrament of Penance; and they will serve us at the Lord's sacrificial table, offering us the bread of life and the chalice of salvation. And they will do all this in the name and in the person of Jesus Himself. Through the power of tonight's ordination, they will, by what they do and by who they are, keep Jesus before our eyes as the Good Shepherd who leads us forward.

If we all hold the gift of faith as a treasure in earthenware jars, these men will carry the gift of their priestly identity and mission also within the earthenware jars of their own fragile humanity. They will need to remember, as we all do, that, in the words of Pope Francis, "*I am a sinner upon whom the Lord has looked with mercy*". Sometimes, people are identified as St John Paul II priests or as Pope Benedict bishops or something similar. To my mind, it is much better that we be identified easily and clearly as priests and bishops of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, these young men are tonight being ordained during the time of Pope Francis and, in particular, in this Jubilee Year of



Mercy. I do not suggest that we think of these men as Pope Francis priests but there is a providence in this graced time which might well mean that, for our five young deacons, the Lord is offering Pope Francis' focus on mercy as one of the primary characteristics which He hopes will mark their priestly lives in a special way.

But for this to happen, our young candidates will need to have great honesty and great courage. They will need to know, deep within them, that what Pope Francis says about himself they, too, must recognise as their own truth. A priest who does not know he is a sinner will never be an effective instrument of the Lord's merciful compassion. If he does not know and feel how much he needs God's mercy, he will never be able to really understand or embrace the suffering of the people he serves. If he has never experienced the freeing and empowering grace of forgiveness, he will never be filled with the desire to let the Lord work through him to set other people free. Rather than being a lifter of people's burdens in the Lord's name, he will, like the scribes and Pharisees of the Gospels, be numbered among those who tie up heavy burdens only to lay them on people's shoulders, refusing to lift even a finger to help them.

Tonight, then, I do not ask our young men to be "Pope Francis priests". Rather, I ask them, I ask you, Matthew, Rodrigo, Truc, Giovanni and David, to be priests after the heart of Jesus, as Pope Francis is and as so many of the priests who have been and who are a part of your lives are as well. Indeed, so many of them are here with you tonight.

Be priests in whose eyes, and in whose smiles, and in whose words, and in whose tears, people encounter the face and the heart of Jesus. Be priests who are living instruments and ministers of Jesus' compassion, of His mercy, or His patience, of His forgiveness and of His love. This is what the Lord is asking of you as He draws you tonight into the mystery of the ordained ministry as priests. It is what we, the People of God, so desperately need from you. It is what will bring you the joy and the peace which is the Lord's promise to you. It is what we all pray for as you come forward to be transformed by the creative power of the Spirit of God.

May God, who has begun this good work in you, now bring it to fulfilment.