



Ordination to the Priesthood

*Kenneth Acosta-Garcia, Marisuz Grech, Tung Vu, Konrad Gagatek,
Joseph Laundry and Patricio Carrera Morales*

HOMILY

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Friday, 17 November, 2017

O God, who have willed that your Priests should minister at the holy altar and serve your people, grant that the labours of your servants may constantly please you and in your Church bear that fruit which lasts for ever.

This prayer, which we will soon pray as the gifts of bread and wine are offered to the Lord, point us to something which is at the heart of our Catholic understanding of the role of ordained priests in our communities of faith. Through their labours, their constant, selfless gift of everything they are and have to all that the Lord is asking of them, God's people will be enabled to bear that fruit which the Lord wishes to bring to fullness in his Church and in his world. This gift of a vocation to the ministerial priesthood – and it is indeed a beautiful and precious gift – is given not so much for the priest himself but for all those who will be drawn through the priest's life and ministry into an ever deeper relationship of love for and commitment to the Lord.

This thought is captured very well in another prayer that is at the heart of our celebration tonight: the prayer of priestly consecration through which, after the laying on of hands, our six young deacons, Joseph, Kenneth, Konrad, Mariusz, Patricio and Tung, will be inwardly transformed into living images of the Good Shepherd among us. At the start of that prayer we will hear the following words addressed to our Heavenly Father: *to form a priestly people you appoint ministers of Christ your Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

It is a long and honoured tradition of our Church to speak of those in the ordained ministry as bishops, priests and deacons. The bishop, notwithstanding his limitations and unworthiness, is placed by God at the head of a local Church, to exercise the fullness of the priesthood, for the good of God's people. Deacons are ordained to assist the bishop and his priests in a spirit of humble service, especially in the practical care of those in need. And priests are ordained to share with the bishop the task of leading and guiding the Church, always after the example of Jesus himself.

But all ordained ministers must remember that the whole people of God is a priestly people and that, as the prayer of consecration puts it, men are chosen by God for the ordained ministry so that through them we will all be enabled to be together the priestly people we are called to be.

In our Catholic tradition there is in fact only one priest, Jesus himself. This is the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews, from which our second reading tonight comes. And, as Saint Paul makes



clear in some of his writings, the priesthood of Jesus is unique. In most ancient religious traditions priests offered sacrifices of animals, or the first fruits of the harvest in order to re-establish a right relationship with God. Jesus instead offered himself and in doing so completely transformed the nature of religion, showing us what priesthood is really all about. It is about living every moment, and every day, of our lives as a gift for the sake of others. It is about being ready to give all that we are and all that we have to God and, in God, to all God's people. This is how Jesus lived his unique priesthood. And this is how we, his priestly people, will live out our sharing in his priesthood.

This might seem like an impossibly high ideal or unrealisable dream – and of course it is if we look only to ourselves or even simply to each other for the strength, the courage and the fidelity to live this way. Rather we must look to the Lord and to his grace and forgiveness. To be in communion with Jesus, and to live from the depths of that communion, is to live as Jesus did, and love as Jesus did, and forgive as Jesus did. And to live and love and forgive as Jesus did is to make our lives a gift for others as Jesus did; it is to live a priestly life, as brothers and sisters of Jesus, our one true priest.

Our Catholic tradition has always known that God loves the world he has created and that God wishes to encounter us in and through the things, and especially the people, he has created. This is why the Lord gives us sacraments as the privileged way of encountering him. Through the created waters of baptism we are washed free from original sin; through the very human rituals of the sacrament of Reconciliation we are forgiven, healed and renewed; through the bread and wine of the Eucharist we are fed with the body and blood of the Lord; through the sacred oil of chrism we are strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And through the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration we are given new priests who are empowered by God to be living signs that the Lord has not abandoned his Church and that he continues to be with us as our shepherd and one true priest. Through their lives and their ministry our priests are God's unique gift to his Church to remind us that we rely not on ourselves or on each other but rather on the one whose living presence as our shepherd our priests are called to be.

And so Joseph, Kenneth, Konrad, Mariusz, Patricio and Tung, in a moment you will step forward and formally respond to this extraordinary invitation the Lord has given you. You will need deep faith, great courage, and unflinching humility. The gift you are given tonight is given for you, of course, but only so that through you the Lord can be present with his people. Tonight you are set apart not so that people can honour you and defer to you, but so that through you the Lord can shine forth. At this time in our Church's history we realise more than ever before how essential the fidelity of our priests is and how destructive our infidelity is.

Each day you will have to remind yourselves that the priesthood is about simple, humble service rather than about domination or control. It is about gentleness and compassion rather than rigidity and arrogance. It is about being proclaimers of the truth – but God's truth, not your own. It is about showing people the way, by word and example, and leading them along this way – but it must be the Lord's way, not your own. Tonight your whole life is given over to the Lord, to his Church and to his People. From tonight you are no longer your own – you are His. We pray that you will always be faithful to this call – for the Church needs you, and God is calling to you.



And here, tonight, we commit ourselves to welcoming, supporting and praying for you and calling forth from you the gifts which the Lord has given you. If you are to help us be the priestly people we are called to be, then we must help you to be the ordained priests the Lord is calling you to be. And so, the moment has come: let us proceed in faith.