



**Ordination to the Priesthood
Dom Robert Nixon OSB**

HOMILY

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

Holy Trinity Abbey, New Norcia, WA
Sunday 28 January, 2018

Today we have gathered here in the Monastery together with Dom Robert as he opens himself to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and allows himself to be molded into a living image of Christ the Good Shepherd – for this is what it means to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood.

I am sure that our hearts are full of gratitude to God for the ways in which he has been at work in Robert's life so far leading him to this extraordinary moment. I am sure, too, that you Robert are also full of thanks as you stand on the threshold of your ordination as a priest. Our presence with you this morning offers us an opportunity to ponder the mysterious ways of God who has been at work not only in your life but in our lives as well.

Each of us has our own story to tell of the sometimes winding pathways we have travelled in response to God's call. And so, today, we all recall our own journeys of faith and thank God for them, just as you, I am sure, are recalling your journey, which I know has taken many unexpected twists and turns but which has always been marked by a sense of God's presence and God's grace at work within you.

Whenever I think of my own particular journey of faith I am reminded of the words of psalm 115. I am sure many of us here, and particularly the members of the Benedictine community, know it well – it forms part of the Liturgy of the Hours, which is such an important aspect of this community's life:

How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?
The cup of salvation I will raise: I will call on the Lord's name.
My vows to the Lord I will fulfill before all his people.
How precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful.

The question the psalm asks is one which we will often find rising in our hearts as we reflect on God's presence in our lives. How can we repay the Lord for his goodness to us? How can we show how grateful we are and how aware we are that we owe everything to him? Today, Robert, as you receive the extraordinary grace of priestly ordination, I would invite you to ponder this question in a special way. Priestly ordination is not a gift that we deserve, or a prize that we have earned. It is a freely given grace offered, in God's mysterious plan, to broken and fragile men who are asked to be living signs that God continues to guide and shepherd his people – and none of us are worthy of this!



The psalm itself offers a suggestion as to how to repay the Lord. Although it is an answer given long before the time of Christ, and certainly long before the emergence of religious life, it is one that you, Robert, as a monk, might well make the pattern of your own life from now on as you begin your priestly life and ministry.

The first thing the psalm suggests is that we raise the cup of salvation. How can we not think of the Eucharist in this context? It is the very heart of our lives as disciples of Jesus and will always be at the center of the life of every ordained priest. For the first time today Robert, together with me, your abbot and your brother priests, you will celebrate the Eucharist as a priest and fulfill the command given by Jesus to his first disciples at the Last Supper. *“Do this in memory of me.”* And through this sacramental ministry God will reach into your life and into the lives of the people you serve, enabling them to become more fully what we are all called to be: the Body of Christ, the living presence of Christ who still opens the eyes of the blind, sets the downtrodden free, and brings liberty to captives. God’s people, the Church, will be able to bring the presence of Christ to others because you, through your sacramental ministry, bring Christ to them.

The psalmist goes on to insist that we must call on the Lord’s name. But we will only do this if we know that we need him. We will only do this if we know that without him we can do nothing – that without him we will sink beneath the waves, as Peter would have done had he not cried out to the Lord when the power of the storm overwhelmed him. Peter knew how helpless he was and how much he needed Jesus –and this realisation was his salvation. It will be our salvation too in those moments when we feel as if everything is too much for us. And so this morning, Robert, I want to say to you: at all times, but especially in times of difficulty, don’t forget to call on the Lord’s name.

The next words of the psalmist are for all of us, of course, but they will have special meaning for you this morning, Robert. *“My vows to the Lord I will fulfill before all his people.”* Today you are ordained as a priest and you will live that priesthood as a member of this Benedictine Community. Never allow your priesthood to overshadow or obscure your identity as a Benedictine. For you the two must never be in opposition but always intertwined. The special gift you have been given, and which is in a remarkable way deepened today, is the gift of the charism of Saint Benedict. Your priesthood must be marked by that charism and by the vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life which underpin your life as a monk. In living this charism you also today through your priestly ordination become a living sacrament of the love and sacrifice of the Good Shepherd, who gives himself without reserve to his flock – and this surely is the witness of religious life, in all its forms, within the Church.

The last thing the psalmist says in the small quote on which we have been reflecting is really a summary of all that he has already said: *How precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful.*

To be ordained a priest is a kind of death – which of course for Christians is the gateway to life. Today Robert you must die to yourself. Today you must let go of everything that has been holding you back from giving yourself fully and finally to God. As today’s Gospel puts it, you are not of this world, any more than Jesus was of this world. Rather, with your brothers, you are in this world offering by your words and the example of your life a different vision of what life, as God gives it to us, is all about. And from today you are ordained to do so as a living sign of the



presence of Jesus among us as our Good Shepherd. Reflect deeply and often on what this is calling you to each day.

This is a daunting task and it is one which is beyond any of us, if we rely simply on ourselves. It is only with the support of our brothers and sisters in the faith, and of course with the never-failing grace of God, that we can hope to respond to all that God is asking of us. Confident in that grace, and in God's fidelity, I invite you now to open yourself to the transforming power of God's Spirit and to the gift of priestly ordination. And know that you are accompanied by our prayers as you take this important step.