

PERMANENT DIACONATE ORDINATION ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL – 17 JULY 2022

By Archbishop Bernard Longley

I became the servant of the Church when God made me responsible for delivering God's message to you.

Today's ordination of Martin Casey and Andrew Lansberry as deacons brings a particular joy to our diocesan family. It is a joy that is shared especially by Samantha and Kate, and by your families together with many friends and the parish communities that you are called to serve in a new way from today. This joy is also felt by all the Permanent Deacons of the Archdiocese as they share the same pathway of service with you.

In the sacrament which we are celebrating we see the mystery of Christ's love and its pattern of service now bearing fruit sacramentally in your lives with a new focus and purpose. That pattern of service is already evident in your own lives and I am grateful for the insights and encouragement that your Parish Priests have offered you. They have helped to foster within you a care for the sick and the housebound, a concern for family life and a gift for teaching, an ability to mix with people of different backgrounds and a commitment to prayer and study, a generous desire to serve the parish through the liturgy and the catechesis of its young people – all of these illustrate your commitment to serve which will now be fruitful in a new way in your ministry as deacons.

St Paul's Letter to the Colossians highlights this important dimension of the pastoral ministry to which the Church has now called you. You are the bearers of God's message. *It was God's purpose...to show all the rich glory of this mystery to the pagans. The mystery is Christ among you, your hope of glory.*

There will be many occasions when it is your responsibility, in support of the bishop or your parish priest, to be a messenger of this Good News within your parish and also in the local community. Your knowledge of the parish community may help you to find ways of sharing the mystery of faith with those who have not yet been touched by the

Gospel. This is of particular significance along the Synodal Pathway when we are urged by the Church to find new ways of listening to our brothers and sisters in faith.

The ministry which you receive today, as you are ordained deacons, is not a ministry of your own making. Your vocation reflects the way of the Kingdom more than the way of the world. Our life as a deacon or a priest is principally something we receive on trust. We are called to accept and adapt ourselves willingly to a way of life determined by the Lord himself and based on our confidence that he is calling us to what is good for the Church and therefore good for us.

Today's readings are very fitting for the ordination of deacons. The diaconal ministry is about service and it requires above all an attitude of service within the person who receives this calling. Such a disposition does not come easily – it is acquired and slowly perfected by practice. It is enriched by prayerful reflection on the scriptures as they set before us examples of service in the life of Jesus himself or in his disciples as God calls them to serve his holy people.

In St Luke's Gospel we witness a poignant encounter between our Lord and the two sisters Martha and Mary. Although Jesus is familiar with this household and received as an honoured guest, something unusual is taking place here. *Martha was distracted with all the serving while Mary sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking.* In its own way this story highlights the transforming value of Christian service as we see what really lies at its heart.

In your ministry as Deacons the practical expression of service, as you seek to care for the needs of others, must never distract you from your own need to listen to the Master. The time you devote to prayer day by day will enrich your service of others in the liturgy, through your pastoral care and as you support a wide range of charitable and social activities.

The Gospel's reflection on listening and serving lies within a powerful scriptural tradition which the Book of Genesis has already highlighted for us. The central act of Abraham in his encounter with the Lord by the oak of Mamre is one of service. It was *the hottest part of the day* so we know that this is costly, self-sacrificing service. In welcoming others and providing for their needs Abraham was serving the living God.

Abraham's appeal to the *three men standing near him* forms a prayer asking for this experience of God's presence to continue. *My Lord, I beg you, if I find favour with you, kindly do not pass your servant by.* God's presence draws out Abraham's instinct to serve. In this beautiful theophany we see a foreshadowing of the teaching of Christ: *whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.*

Dear brothers, you are being ordained to go out and preach the Good News with confidence and without fear. The Lord himself is sending you to establish lives of loving service in the heart of the communities where you live. The world around us is always in danger of losing its spiritual and moral compass and it needs witnesses such as yourselves who will point the way to Christ by lives of dedicated service.

There is no need to shun the world but to love the world as deacons who are caught up in the love of Christ - delivering God's message that he loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to redeem it. In your service of others bring them into the presence of God so that with them and with Abraham you may say: *My Lord, I beg you, if I find favour with you, kindly do not pass your servant by.*

WELCOME

Welcome to St Chad's Cathedral on this warm afternoon for our joyful Mass of Ordination. Our Vicar General Canon Richard Walker and the Dean of the Cathedral, Mgr Timothy Menezes join me in welcoming you today. We gather to pray for Martin Casey and Andrew Lansberry who are to be ordained as deacons.

I welcome our two candidates' wives Samantha and Kate, together with their children and the other members of their families. A particular welcome to any parishioners or friends who are unable to join us at the Cathedral today but who are united with us in prayer from your homes via the live-streaming.

Taking part at his home in Oxford, I also welcome Fr Harry Curtis who is very disappointed to have tested positive for Covid and therefore sends his apologies today. Fr Harry, we wish you the mildest of symptoms and a very speedy recovery.

I welcome Fr Michael Dolman, the Rector of St Mary's College, Oscott. I thank you, Fr Gerardo Fabrizio and the Seminary Staff for all the support and guidance offered to Martin and Andrew during their years of formation.

Finally, I welcome all the members of this congregation and I invite you once more to stand.

ENVOI

Thank you once again for coming to the Cathedral today or for joining us from your home.

My thanks to Mgr Timothy Menezes and all the Cathedral team for their hard work preparing the Cathedral for today's celebration, and for welcoming and guiding all our guests.

I also thank Professor David Saint and the Cathedral Choir for the music at today's Ordination, together with my Secretary, Fr Dominic Cosslett, Fr Craig Szmidt and Fr Michael Glover for MC-ing today's ceremony.

I want to thank our two new Deacons' Parish Priests, Fr Philip Harrop and Fr Sebastian Namattathil, together with all your parishioners for supporting Deacons Martin and Andrew through your prayers and encouragement over the years.

A particular word of thanks to Fr Harry Curtis, the Diocesan Director of the Permanent Diaconate and to Deacon Pete Middleton and the members of the Formation Team for all their dedicated work.

We pray that Deacons Martin and Andrew will have many years of joyful service ahead of them – and may we all be blessed with a joyful, peaceful - and eventually cooler - week ahead.