

Homily for Diaconate of Albert Lawes, Plymouth Cathedral, 12th July 2020

Well, it is not Palazzola. It is not Rome. A diaconate ordination does not have any anointings, although at this one, you would wonder, with all the cleansing gel we have to use! Albert, this is not how we had envisaged your diaconate ordination was going to be. But the sun is shining. And, in the mystery of God's Providence, the Church receives a new deacon. In the diocese we celebrate the gift of a new servant of Christ. Your bishop gives thanks to God and we all rejoice that this day has come.

At its face value, the Gospel we have heard, is normally understood as a description of four types of people, and how they do, or do not, receive God's Word. In the tradition of the Church, and especially in the Fathers, whom you love so much, Albert, it has also been seen as a reflection on the four states of a person's soul, of their inner life. And indeed, as an indication of the effectiveness, or not, of Apostolic Ministry. Pope Saint Paul VI reminded us, that the primary task of the ordained minister is to proclaim the Gospel. We do so by attending to both our inner life with God and our effectiveness as Sowers of His Word, modelled on the pattern of Christ the Sower.

Albert, you will be aware, as we all are, of the times when our own hearts have been like a concrete path, to God's Word. We thank God for the Sacrament of Penance, that helps the Lord to break us open to His promptings. In your future proclamation of the Gospel, too, there will be times when it feels as though what you are saying, what you are doing, is falling on deaf ears, on impermeable surfaces. At those points, it is important to remember this image of Christ the Sower, the one who continues to throw the seed liberally, even recklessly, in the hope that some may fall in the right place.

You have already begun to put down deep roots in your prayer life. I pray that this will continue and deepen in the years ahead. It is the only thing which will enable you to sustain a committed life as deacon, and later as a priest. Soon, in the ceremony, you will hear these words, as you are given the Book of the Gospels, "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose Herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practise what you teach." Always strive to have an integrity between your inner life and your outer life. Draw deeply on the Church's traditions of the Divine Office, of Eucharistic Adoration, of a love of Our Lady. These will help your roots go deeper, that you be more fruitful.

I hope that the worries of the world or the lure of riches will not be too much of a trouble. But you never know! The Lord clearly sees such preoccupations as thorns which can choke our fruitfulness. In this context, we must also speak of the commitment to celibacy which you make your own today. It is clear, in the way that the Church understands this, that it is for you, a path to greater fruitfulness and freedom. It is not something which chokes us as human beings or stops us from loving. Never must we experience, or live celibacy, as a refusal to love. It is a call to love people in a different, but no less real, way. When we do so, with great generosity, it is a pathway to real freedom, not just for us, but for those entrusted to our care. You will know, as every celibate does, that this is only possible by relying on God's grace, and especially drawing close to Jesus, our most intimate companion. It is He who teaches each of us how to love chastely and to live celibacy as a generous sacrifice. For us celibates, Jesus is the only One, today and always.

You will have already experienced in your own life, the fruitfulness of the Gospel. How it enriches and gives meaning to human life. I want to give thanks in this regard for the example and generosity of your family, especially your parents. It is good that your family in Australia are part of this celebration, too. It is within the family that we first learn to love unconditionally, to forgive, and to reach out in love and service to others. It is good, too for us to recall that today, the 12th July, is also the day when the Church keeps the memory of St Louis and St Zelig, Martin, the parents of St Therese. May they watch over your family and be, in your ministry, an inspiration to proclaim the dignity and holiness of marriage and family life.

At University in Falmouth, in the seminary and in pastoral placements, too, you have seen and experienced the abundant fruitfulness of the Word sown in rich soil. Now, you will nurture and tend the field of God's Word through your own public ministry. You will do so, knowing that when you experience something of the Lord's harvest, it is usually because of the generous sowing that took place by another, many years before. This will also teach you to continue to be generous with sowing God's Word yourself, not just by what you say, but more importantly by who you are. Be always willing to sacrifice your own visions and plans to God's plan, to His purposes. May He make you abundantly fruitful as His deacon.

It is a great joy, and deeply humbling, for us to be part of this Ordination today, and to give thanks to God for the fruits of His love which he enables us to experience. We look forward, too, to witnessing the many ways in which the Lord will make your Ministry fruitful from this day forwards. It

is to Him, that we give the glory, for he makes possible the harvest - thirty, and sixty, and a hundredfold.

+Mark O'Toole,
Bishop of Plymouth