

Ordination to the Diaconate – Matthew Tonini 26 September 2020

The readings for the Rite of Ordination lead us to reflect on the meaning of service in our Christian community, particularly service in the pastoral ministry of preaching the Gospel in word and action.

There are a selection of readings that can be chosen for the rite, as well as readings from the day.

The following selection from Jeremiah emphasises the action of God's spirit among us in calling forward those who serve the community in proclaiming the Word in our common prayer and in compassionate pastoral service. The psalm praises God's loving action, which is proclaimed by the service of those who serve in our midst. The second reading reminds us that the ministry of preaching is one part of the rich tapestry of ministries gifted to the many members of our church community. Finally, the Gospel recalls that all authentic Christian ministry is grounded in, unified by and springs from the following of Jesus' way of servant leadership.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

1:4-9

The word of the Lord was addressed to me saying:

*'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
before you came to birth I consecrated you;
I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.'*

I said 'Ah Lord; look I do not know how to speak:
I am a child!'

But the Lord replied,

*'Do not say "I am a child."
Go now to those to whom I send you
and say whatever I command you.*

*Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to protect you –
it is the Lord who speaks!'*

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my
mouth and said to me:

'There! I place my words in your mouth.'

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 100

℟. Go out to all the world, and tell the good news.

Cry out with joy to the Lord all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness,
Come before the Lord singing for joy. ℟.

Know that the Lord, the Lord is God,
who made us and to whom we belong.
We are God's people, the sheep of the flock. ℟.

Go within God's gates giving thanks.
Enter God's courts with songs of praise.
Give thanks to God, and bless the Lord's name. ℟.

Indeed how good is the Lord,
eternal God's merciful love.
God is faithful from age to age. ℟.

First Reading

Jeremiah's prophetic mission is marked by his great sensitivity to God's love for his people and a profound understanding of this people's commitment to respond to the one who calls them into a covenant of loving relationship. The reading recalls the story of Jeremiah's call, in which God's intimate knowing of Jeremiah, as God knows each of us, calls him to respond in service: to proclaim God's word of loving kindness to her people. The dialogue is dominated by God speaking, with Jeremiah's interjection expressing some anxiety about his capability and authority to carry out the work of being God's "prophet to the nations." There is rich imagery of God's intimate knowing, care and encouragement in this dialogue that the reader can express with an intentionally-paced and affirming tone.

God's final action of touching Jeremiah's mouth, realises the promise made: those called to proclaim the Word are not alone in the work. God is with them in the very word they proclaim in their word and action.

Responsorial Psalm

This psalm is one of three invitatory psalms that may be prayed at the beginning of the day in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is in the form of a song of praise to God.

The psalm echoes the care and closeness with which God holds us and the gladness, joy and thanks that arise in our hearts when we respond in service of one another.

The response echoes the call of the first reading to proclaim the word of God to the nations. The very act of proclaiming the good news of God's compassionate (merciful) love in word and action, as the psalm does, is itself a joyful praise of God.

This psalm is most appropriately sung.

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

12:4-8

Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other.

Our gifts differ according to the grace given us. If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching.

Let the preachers deliver sermons, the almsgivers give freely, the officials be diligent, and those who do works of mercy do them cheerfully.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

20:25-28

Jesus called the twelve to him and said,

'You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you.

No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

My charisma, the gift given me to give to the community, is my *self*, ultimately... My self is to be given away in love not because it is worthless, but because it is supremely precious, given to me by the hand of God... My identity as lover in the community is uniquely coloured by the loves in which I have already struggled, failed, learned, repented... 'Love your neighbour as your self'... Begin to see your self as gift, love it as gift, from God's hand, and learn how the neighbour too is gift, to himself or herself, and to you.

(Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*. London: DL& Todd, 1982, 43-44)

Second Reading

Here we have Paul's thoughts on unity in diversity. Paul emphasises our union in Christ through our diversity of gifts, using the image of the human body as he does in his other letters.

Paul is addressing the early Christians of Rome and any Christian community where elevating one or two forms of service over others, causes division and injustice in the community. Instead, Paul encourages the community to focus on how our diversity of gifts serves to bring us together in the work of proclaiming and living the gospel. More important is our unity in Christ and in the work of sharing the good news through the gifts and skills that have been gifted to us through the reality of the people and places of our lives. We are united in our following of Jesus Christ, through our different gifts that build community.

The person ordained in the community shares in this diversity of gifts and in the united mission of the community to proclaim the good news in word and action.

Gospel

This gospel reading occurs following Jesus' third foretelling of his death at the hands of his enemies and the request of two of the apostles for positions of power in the kingdom that Jesus proclaims.

Jesus' teaching is in response to the anger among the apostles that is expressed in this apparent power grab. Jesus is clear that domination and power for personal gain is not the way of his followers.

This teaching is relevant to the particular situation of the person being ordained, but also to all forms of leadership in our lives, whether school, community, business or government. We are called to express our leadership as an act of service. Leadership in the way of Jesus, is authentically expressed and known in and through service of others. The one ordained among us is called to be a visible sign and living example of this authenticity in leadership in the midst of our community.

The giving of one's life to this way of service might be understood through the words of Rowan Williams on the gift of self (see left).