

Ordination to the diaconate

Early one Saturday in December 1531, a Mexican farmer set off for Mass, but walking along, he was suddenly distracted by lights and music, and a voice calling his name: *Juan Diego!* Climbing the hill, he met a young woman bathed in light, dressed like a princess, who told him to ask the bishop to build a church on the spot. He went to the bishop, but he, no doubt wondering what on earth his Diocesan Finance & Property Board might say, said he wanted proof. So Juan Diego went back and again met the Woman from Heaven, who told him to take the bishop some flowers. She wrapped the flowers in his cloak, but when he arrived and let them fall out, the bishop fell to his knees. For there, impressed on the cloak, was the beautiful image we today call Our Lady of Guadalupe. Soon after, millions of native peoples converted to Christ, and Guadalupe is now the biggest Marian shrine on earth. Yet one of the most remarkable aspects of the image is the belt Mary is wearing, an Aztec sign of pregnancy. It's the only image of the Blessed Virgin as pregnant, carrying in her womb the new life of Christ. This image of Mary carrying Jesus is also an icon of the Church, which carries Jesus in her heart and presents him to all as the Saviour of the World, the One who offers the new Life in abundance.

John Paul, this image also depicts the mission of a deacon. In a moment, you will take the promise of celibacy in imitation of Jesus Himself, Who was celibate and as a sign of total dedication to God and the service of His People. You will receive the Sacrament of Holy Order configuring you to Christ the Head of the Church and Servant of all. It's been a long route to this day, one not without suffering and a frightening accident, but one through the prayers of St. John Paul II, led by God's Providence. JP, your parents Joe and Julie, your sisters Nicola, Dawn and their families, this parish and our Diocese, and all your friends here, me too: we are very proud of you today and profoundly grateful for what you are doing. For as you lie prostrate on the sanctuary floor in prayer and self-sacrifice, we not only recall the part we've played in your journey, but are challenged to renew our own faith and commitment to Christ as His disciples.

Let me add one more point from the 2ndR: *It is not ourselves that we are preaching but Christ Jesus as the Lord. We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure.* One of the problems with today's secular culture is that it breeds narcissism, people self-absorbed, driven by comfort and feelings, who always put themselves first. A deacon can never be like that, as Jesus warned: *Anyone who loves his life, loses it.* A deacon is a servant, a self-sacrificer, one who is Other-centred, sharing Jesus' three-fold ministry of the altar, Word and charity - although I go further. For a 21C deacon must be an evangeliser, one who bears in his heart the joy of the Gospel, who engages in a critical dialogue with contemporary culture, who seeks, like Mary, to offer the world new life. We cannot bring that new life of Christ without each day spending time with Him, adoring Him, drawing energy from His Sacred Heart in the Holy Eucharist. Without that time each day, you will never like St. Peter in 1stR be able to give a personal testimony, *I and those with me can witness to everything he did.* So in this Advent Mass, as we ask Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego to pray for expectant mothers and for respect for life from conception to natural death, we pray for you. We thank God for your faith and your vocation. We rejoice in your ordination. And as we look forward to your priesthood in the summer, we ask the Sacred Heart of Christ to fill you and those you serve as a deacon with new Life that lasts forever.