

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD OF PHILIP CARROLL

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; naught be all else to me save that Thou art, Thou my best thought by day or by night, waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.* In this Mass, we witness something rarely seen these days, something radical, risky yet deeply moving, indeed, awe-inspiring. It's a supreme act of love. For that's what the ordination of a priest is, and that's what the life of a priest is: a supreme act of love, in imitation of Jesus Christ, Who *came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.* Today in this Mass, our relative and friend, Philip Carroll gives himself to God in a supreme act of love. Like getting married, when a man is ordained, it's as if the whole of his life-story is amassed together. Which is why we pray not only for Phil but for all who have nurtured his vocation: his dear parents, Jenny and Robert, his brother, sisters, relatives and friends, the teachers and children from his schooldays, colleagues from work, and latterly, the staff and students of the seminary. All of us have a stake in the sacred action taking place before us as this man lays down his life before the altar. And in turn all of us are challenged to give ourselves more fully, in love and service, to God our Creator.

But let me recall what St. Paul said in 1stR: *We are in difficulties on all sides but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems but never despair; we've been persecuted but never deserted, knocked down but never killed.* Phil, we thank you profoundly for what you are doing today. We thank you profoundly for giving us an example of what love truly is. We thank you for giving your life to serve Christ and His Church here in our wonderful Diocese of Portsmouth. But please don't be naïve. Don't be misled. Don't be overly romantic. The way of life you've chosen will not be easy. It will be costly. In fact, it will cost you everything. For in Christianity, priesthood is victimhood. To be a priest means to be a victim. For the Priest and the Victim are one and the same, Jesus Christ. Remember His question *Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?* Yet if you love Him in your heart, if you keep close to Him, if you devoutly in the Mass join yourself to His Sacrifice, then like St. Paul you'll drink from His Heart the strength, power and consolation that enables us to bear the Cross.

Recently, as you know, there's been a discussion in the media about celibacy and the ordination of married men, a topic often ventilated and very relevant to the Church's evangelising mission in this daunting yet exciting 21C. The Church permits exceptions and if you counted all the clergy of the Eastern Rites and those of the Ordinariates, nearly 1% of Catholic priests worldwide are married men. But the norm (99%) is celibacy. --Because the Church has held from the earliest times that the celibate way of loving best expresses what we believe a priest to be and best assists his self-sacrificing service. Celibacy, then, is not just a discipline or a canon law requirement. It's much more. It's a way of imitating Jesus Christ, Who, quite exceptionally for his day, chose celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, in order to be humanity's Priest, Prophet and Shepherd. Phil, look at the bishop's ring: it symbolises the marriage of Christ the Head and His Bride the Church. As a priest you in Him are married to the Church, to this Diocese, to these people. You are their father, their husband, their brother, their servant.

Let me add one last point: take care to avoid clericalism. By clericalism, I mean a cleric whose internal spiritual life seems to have dried up. Yes, he keeps the show on the road, but an inner migration seems to have sapped his youthful vigour and enthusiasm. Playing safe in grey routines, there's little fervour for Jesus and the joy of the Gospel; there's no freshness, creativity, outreach or boldness. You, Phil, are being ordained on a great feast, that of the Apostle and Martyr St. James, which makes us think of the *Camino*, the classic pilgrimage-route that mirrors the soul's journey to heaven. This is why it's crucial not to let the green wood go dry but each day of life's journey to keep developing a deeper personal-passionate friendship with the Lord. Promise Him now that you'll offer the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours every day, that you'll regularly go to Confession and have spiritual direction, that you'll do spiritual reading and contemplate the three-fold mission of Christ as Priest, Teacher and Shepherd. Above all, promise Him now to spend an hour a day in Eucharistic Adoration, united with Him. If you keep the green wood green, you'll not only be fresh with love for your people: you'll be able to engage with all the challenges of the day. Don't just be a man of the Church: be a man of God.

*We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, St. Paul said, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.* In a moment, you'll be ordained a priest and what God wished from all eternity will be fulfilled. Today, the end of one *Camino* becomes in fact the start of another, a great adventure. The Lord will never desert you. I promise you, you've chosen the best, the greatest, the most fulfilling way of life a man could ever choose. So in this Mass, as we call on the prayers of the Blessed Mother, St. Edmund, St. James, St. John Vianney and all the saints, we ask the Lord to bless you with his love. May you be filled with happiness. May you persevere in your vocation. May you one day be found worthy to enter Paradise and hear the Lord Jesus Himself speak to you those thrilling words: *Well done, good and faithful servant; come and enter the happiness of your Lord.*