

DIACONATE ORDINATION: ROSS BULLOCK AND JOHN SCOTT

*Blessed is the Virgin Mary, who bore the Son of the eternal Father.* Today with the Blessed Mother we cry *Magnificat!* as we joyfully offer this Mass commemorating that day when Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, presented her as a child in the Temple. In this way, as the Gospel reading suggested, Mary grew up totally dedicated to God's service, to doing God's will, to listening each day to God's Word and to putting that Word into practice. Her life-long obedience came to fruition in the Annunciation, when she gave consent to the message of the angel, and God's Word took flesh in her womb, thus initiating the recreation of the universe. That's why today's feast prepares us well for Advent and Christmas. But it's also a splendid day for the diaconal ordination of our brothers, Ross Bullock and John Scott. Ross and John, each in their own way, have undergone a remarkable spiritual journey over many years. Like Mary, they've heard God's Word. He calls them to serve Him as priests, and today, among their friends here in the seminary, we have the joy of their ordination to the diaconate.

Let me pause at this point. For in a moment Ross and John will make a promise of celibacy. Celibacy, as you know, always gets people going and recently in the media there's been discussion about the ordination of married men. The Church does of course permit exceptions and so, if you count all the clergy of the Eastern Rites, as well as those of the Ordinariates, almost 1% of Catholic priests worldwide are married men. But the norm (99%) is celibacy. --Because the Church has held from earliest times that the celibate way of living-and-loving best expresses what a priest 'is' in his self-sacrificing service. This is why celibacy is not just a discipline or a requirement of canon law. It's far more. It's in imitation of Jesus Christ, Who, counter-culturally for his time, chose to be celibate as humanity's Priest, Prophet and Shepherd. In other words, celibacy expresses well what we believe a priest to be: a man for others, married to his people as father, husband, brother, servant.

But let me say a word about being a deacon. The 2011 National Census showed that 25% of Brits are now unchurched, with no religion, and that by the end of the decade Christians will be in a minority. Since Christ is the only way to human salvation and happiness, the task of mission and evangelisation is now very urgent. In the past, our clergy were trained to be chaplains to the Catholic community and the laity, consumers of the sacraments. But today we must be mission-directors who help our people to be missionary disciples, offering the Gospel to all, especially the poor and needy. In this, the deacon has a unique role. Sacramentally configured to Christ the Servant, sharing His ministry of altar, Word and charity, a deacon must manifest to others, like Mary, total dedication to God's service, to doing God's will, to listening to God's Word and to putting that Word into practice. This is why, Ross and John, every day you must spend time with Jesus, adoring Him in the Holy Eucharist, drawing from His Sacred Heart all the strength and energy you need.

*Blessed is the Virgin Mary, who bore the Son of the eternal Father.* We look forward to their priestly ordination next summer, but in this Mass on the Feast of Mary's Presentation, as Ross and John lie prostrate on the sanctuary floor in prayer and self-sacrifice, let's call on the prayers of the Blessed Mother. Just as she did, may Ross and John have the grace to give themselves, today and every day, totally to Him.