

**PERMANENT DIACONATE ORDINATION
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, BICESTER: 8 JULY 2017**

The Word is very near to you: it is in your mouth and in your heart.

Today's ordination of Nick St John here at Bicester as a deacon for our diocese enriches the life of the Church and strengthens her mission. It also brings a particular joy into our diocesan life and this joy is shared, Nick, by your wife Clare, your mother Teresa, and by your children Tom and Charlotte - together with your all family and friends, and especially by Canon John, Fr Linh and the parish community that you are called to serve in a new way from today.

In the sacrament which we are celebrating we see our Lord's own ministry of service through the power of the Holy Spirit now beginning to bear fruit sacramentally in Nick's life with a new focus and purpose. Nick, in your relationship with our Lord your eyes are now re-positioning so that you can see those he wants you to serve as a deacon. The grace you receive today is already a fulfilment of your life's calling – something you have been discerning over many years.

The Gospel that you have chosen for today emphasises the particular focus that is going to shape and characterise your ministry as the years unfold ahead of us. The discussion between our Lord and the lawyer arises from his wish *to disconcert* our Lord. However, it enables the Lord to see beyond the question into the man's heart and his response is the sublime teaching he offers about human compassion.

This is an encounter that will reflect the work of evangelisation that lies before you, Nick, as a deacon, and it leads to a story that is both challenging and uplifting – the parable of the Good Samaritan. This will remind you that the people you will serve and draw closer to the Lord in your ministry need you to tell them the story of salvation in Jesus Christ. They need to see his openness to goodness in unexpected places – remember how shocked Jesus' companions would have been at his praise for a man from Samaria.

You will have to face and overcome prejudice and misunderstanding in your ministry, leading people beyond their current limitations and out of their comfort zones to find the truth in Christ and, often to their surprise and delight, within themselves. When we met recently to prepare for today's Ordination you spoke of your conviction and told me: *the Lord called me to this ministry to help people know Jesus better, to go on a deeper journey.* You said that prayer, servanthood and evangelisation would be the three priorities driving your ministry.

Over the years you have listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in your life and you have followed the sacramental pathways along which the Lord has been leading you. With Clare you received and you ministered to each other the Sacrament of Marriage so that your lives together have been fruitful. Through your marriage you are already witnesses to Christ's love for his bride the Church. I know that Clare has helped you in discerning your vocation to the diaconate and encouraged you in your formation at the Seminary at Oscott. Clare is united with you today in the Eucharist and she will support you in your ministry as a deacon.

The sacrament of Holy Orders opens up a distinctive pathway, not only of ministry and service, but also a journey of personal sanctification – this life of service as a deacon now becomes the way of salvation chosen for you. The Church calls you to be holy through a life of service for the good of others. This will mean above all preaching the Word of God and assisting at the Eucharist, reaching out as a pastor and evangeliser with the mind of the Church and working closely with Canon John, Fr Linh and Deacon Michael.

One of your most important tasks will be to proclaim God's Word in the Gospel, and to share with others its significance and power through your preaching. As you preach you will try to stir people's hearts as well as engaging their minds, since the Holy Spirit always works to bring about a conversion of the heart.

As you use the charism you are receiving through your ordination, remember the insight of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium: The Holy Spirit...enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church. They are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelizing impulse.* (§121)

You have already shown that you believe this, especially through your commitment to work with your brothers and sisters in the other Christian communities of Bicester. I am grateful that you will continue to play an active part in the life and work of Churches Together in Bicester. The presence of so many Church leaders with us today witnesses to your commitment together to bring the Good News ever more effectively to the people of this growing town.

Our Lord is sending you to evangelize with your whole life through the Sacrament we celebrate today. Keep nothing back from Jesus – be wholehearted in what you commit to him and be generous in dedicating your time, your energy and interests to the commission the Church is giving you today. Overflow with the love that you receive from the heart of Jesus. May the prayers of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and of all the saints also support you this day.