

SERMON FOR SERVICE OF ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon

Welcome to you all – Bishop John, Dean Chris, Archdeacon Bruce, the clergy gathered to support the appointments of Rev. Laurel Dahill as Regional Dean of Golden Ears and The Rev. Stephen Rowe as Regional Dean of Peach Arch; the Collation of The Venerable Kelly Duncan as Archdeacon of Loughheed, and the Ordinands, Neil and Martha, your priests and all your supporters, for your Ordination to the sacred Order of Deacons.

Neil, and Martha I am sure you thought this day might never arrive – all those interviews, courses, papers, retreats, doubts, fears, more interviews, questions, discussions, and purchasing of all the appropriate clothing!!!

We have arrived at a day that you have certainly been waiting for – and I wonder now we are here how you are feeling? How does that clergy collar feel? I remember feeling alternatively elated, mystified, and honestly wishing the floor would open up, swallow me, and I could forget all about this crazy thing called the Diaconate. In fact, you should be feeling very strange, because pretty soon Bishop John is going to ask you to make some pretty hefty promises, and ordain you to a ministry for which you may think you are prepared, but which will undoubtedly give you some major surprises. But the good news is that you are never alone – not only are you partnered in your mission by Our Lord, but you have some great supports here on earth. Do not be afraid to use them – we are not expected to go off into the wilderness alone – the bishop, Archdeacon for Deacons and your priest and support groups and myself, are here for you, not just today but every day of your ministry.

We celebrate today, not just the vows you will be making very shortly, but also the life of a 17th century deacon, Nicholas Ferrar. Yesterday we celebrated the life of Francis Xavier also a wonderful example of diaconal ministry as he was a missionary to a foreign land, who learned an important lesson that is often credited to another Francis: Saint Francis of Assisi: Preach the gospel; use words if you have to.

Francis Xavier had difficulty learning new languages, but he learned that words are not the only way of communicating the truth, and his personal witness and testimony made a great impression on the people he encountered.

Likewise, you may find yourselves in situations where you have no idea what to say – and that's when I say: Don't Say; just Pray. Allow the Spirit to guide you – and She will.

Today however, we are celebrating another wonderful diaconal life: Nicholas Ferrar a deacon of the English church who founded a community with his family at Little Gidding. If that name sounds familiar to you it is likely because it was made famous by TS Eliot in his eponymous poem which is one of The Four Quartets. Nicholas and his family moved to Little Gidding in 1626 to a rather derelict manor house and hay barn which had once been a chapel. They formed a rather strict religious community consisting of his immediate family but also various

nieces and nephews and together they restored the farm, providing them with a livelihood. This also enabled them to care for their neighbours, setting up a school for the local children, and caring for the sick and the destitute.

As it says in *For All the Saints*, Nicholas Ferrar's vocation was to partner with his entire family to study true wisdom and perfection in Christ Jesus, build up each other's faith and to practise a constant round of service to their rural community.

Two wonderful examples of Diaconal Ministry – and then of course we have Dean Robert of Canterbury Cathedral and his Garden Congregation. For those of you who may not be familiar with the Dean of Canterbury, in less than two years his YouTube presentation of Morning Prayer, has reached thousands of views around the world. A week ago, Dean Robert, who is the same age as me, was hunkered down in a little shelter in the pigsty, hopefully on fresh hay, sheltering from a terrible hail storm, wearing his black cassock, and green wellies. To me that epitomized Christian ministry, down in the muck and sharing the Gospel!

The deacons of the diocese were privileged to have Dean Robert as our keynote speaker for our recent Deacons Day, and he speaks fondly of his ordination to the diaconate and the ministry of deacons.

This is a great segue to our readings for today, and our gospel reading from Luke, the well-known story of Jesus having dinner with Martha and Mary and their family. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening intently to what He is saying, while Martha is distracted with her many tasks. She complains to Jesus that her sister is not helping, but instead of Mary being admonished for not assisting with the tasks, it is Martha who is told by Jesus that she is worried about too many things. It is a complete reversal of what Martha was expecting to hear from Jesus.

I can't help feeling that perhaps Martha might sometimes act like those people who love to fuss around (perhaps making work for themselves) and then complain bitterly that they are the only ones getting anything done. Jesus in fact tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better part, which is really taking time to – A – Listen and B – discern what is truly important.

Can you imagine having Jesus coming for dinner, and then spending all your time in the kitchen. As deacons most likely wired to help and serve, we too can, on occasions, get too mired in details that we miss some important stuff. What could be more important than to sit at the feet of our Lord and listen to His teaching. Food preparation, and clearing of dishes can be done at any time, we need to sometimes STOP and smell the roses too, and listen for the voice of God.

One of the most important parts of the ministry of deacons is to empower other people to exercise their own gifts and talents. Some people are reluctant to become involved or put a new idea out there, because it seems like things are working so well, and no one wants to be the one to change something, let alone mess it up. But it can be good to relinquish tasks we may have done for quite a while, and encourage others to take over, and then allow them to do

it in their own way. Someone once told me the art of good leadership is getting people to do what you would like them to do and leave them thinking it was their idea.

Finding the balance between service and martyrdom can sometimes be tricky!

For those of you being appointed or collated to new ministries as Regional Deans, and Archdeacon, I refer again to Dean Robert Willis, the *Rock Star of Canterbury*. If you have been following along over these past few months with the Garden Congregation, we have been reading through the books of Genesis and Exodus but concluded this journey through part of the Pentateuch with a reading from the last chapter of Deuteronomy when Moses dies on Mount Pisgah. He has previously laid his hands on Joshua and commissioned him to lead the Israelites across the Jordan into the Promised Land. A new beginning.

Laurel, Stephen and Kelly, you are now going to be appointed and collated for new positions of ministry and leadership which carry responsibilities for not just your congregations now, but others in your deaneries and archdeaconry, and our diocese. As I said to our two ordinands you are not alone in these ministries, you have supports from our bishop and your communities and I pray that your ministries are also fulfilling and productive.

Martha and Neil, your lives are certainly going to change – once you put that clergy collar on people will see you and treat you differently. You can't change that, and it may take some time for you to get used to that. The most important thing to realize is that it is now a symbol of something – I remember a few years ago getting badly cut off while trying to merge to go through the Deas Island Tunnel – it was clearly my turn but a man in a big truck literally ran me off the road to get into the tunnel before me. I was about to wind down my window and give him a piece of my mind, when I remembered I was heading into town for an induction I think it was and was wearing my clergy shirt. I quickly put the window up and smiled at him instead. There will undoubtedly be times when you feel you haven't lived up to your best, but always remember that so long as we try our best, that is all that we can do.

And most importantly Pray, Pray, Pray – and Listen, Listen, Listen – to the people around you and to the God you serve.

May you all be richly blessed in your new ministries.

AMEN