

It's been the most enormous joy and privilege to spend the past few days with those preparing for ordination today. Simon and Vince, Eryl, Steve, Andy, Hugh, Nick and Siôn, have reached an important day. As together, we celebrate their ministry and they will see God's blessing and Commission for the ministry that lies ahead. Ordination is the recognition of the work that God has already been doing in and through them throughout their lives. Whether in teaching or business, administration or management, at worship on Sunday, in their Monday to Saturday lives, each of them has been watching out for God's purpose and listening to God's call. On our retreat, we spent time reflecting on a prayer which is usually attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila. I'm going to share that with you now.

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world.  
Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people.*

Those words speak to the whole Church. We are the body of Christ and our whole body are his to use for service in the world. Wherever there is a kindly smile, a gentle touch: wherever someone walks the extra mile, or goes out of their way to help a stranger, Christ is at work. Today, the Church recognizes that Christ has been at work in and through Simon and Vince, Eryl, Steve, Andy, Hugh, Nick, and Siôn, and blesses that work. We bless God for the good things that have been done already, and we look forward to the new things that they will do. In ordination, the church blesses and commissions them to new roles and ministries.

Simon and Vince will begin to have the privilege of presiding at the Eucharist on behalf of the whole congregation. They will have the responsibility of blessing you, and assuring you of God's forgiveness, in the name of the whole Church. Steve, Andy, Hugh, Sean and Nick will baptize new Christians. They will preach and teach. They will take funerals. They will have a particular ministry of caring and sharing God's love with all. They can do none of this in their own strength alone, but only in the grace of God, and only as part of the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus will use their hands to bless and comfort, to invite people into his kingdom and to share his bread. Jesus will use their feet to get out and about in the towns and villages of North Wales, to seek out the lonely and the lost, to stand up for those who are weak or oppressed. And to walk with others on their journey of faith. Finally, they will learn to look with the compassionate gaze of

Jesus. That look of tender and loving mercy. The search and attention that can help us to know that we are loved and forgiven, particularly when we no longer see this for ourselves.

In doing this, I pray that they will draw deeply on their own experience of Jesus' unconditional love. Placing themselves often before the compassionate gaze of Jesus in reflection and prayer. In being blessed and commissioned, chosen and sent, the ministry and the Church, these new priests and deacons take their place among the apostles sent out by Jesus himself and the saints before them. One cannot spend long in North Wales, without becoming aware that we're walking in the footsteps of the saints of long ago. So many places are associated with the names of those who first brought the good news to the farmers and fishermen of these mountains, woods and harbours.

Standing on the beach at Nant Gwrtheyrn, where I've spent the last few days with those preparing to be ordained, one feels very close to those early Christians. The view can hardly have changed. A couple of months ago, I was standing on another beach on the shores of Lake Galilee. It is purportedly the beach where Jesus shared breakfast with his friends after his resurrection, the setting of our Gospel reading this morning (John 21.15-19). Here, we see Jesus commissioning and blessing Peter for a new ministry in the Church. To understand this conversation, you need to remember that before his death, Peter let Jesus down badly. On the night that Jesus was being questioned and tortured in the whole priest heist, Peter denied knowing him three times. Now for the first time he's coming face to face with his friend.

Imagine the compassionate gaze of Jesus. Loving, steady, careful. But then perhaps you can also imagine Peter's feelings of confusion and shame. The guilt going through his mind. The words he can't quite get out. But Jesus doesn't blame him or ask for an apology. He knows Peter's weakness, and he has already forgiven him. Instead, Jesus focuses on the most important thing. He asks Peter a question to which he already knows the answer. He just wants Peter to hear himself say. Do you love me? "Lord, You know I do?" Jesus asks three times, wiping out the three denials that Peter made in the courtyard. Then he commissions Peter to a new task, and sends him out to care for the flock. Three times he says. "Feed my sheep".

Jesus' final words to Peter may seem puzzling to us. He tells Peter that he will not be in control of his own life from now on. The belts that he has been used to fastening around his own waste will be taken off and used to tie his hands. As we read those words today we know that at the end of his life, Peter was killed in the persecution of Christians. It is a reminder to us that a calling to follow Jesus, a vocation, is not only a recognition of God already at work, but a calling

to sacrifice. Our new priests and deacons know that they have already given up their time to study, to pray, to service in the church. In some cases, over many years. Because I want to acknowledge the sacrifices that the rest of you, their friends and family have made, because of the love that you have for Simon and Vince, for Eryl, Steve, Andy, Siôn, Hugh and Nick. You have generously given them the time and space to study, to pray, and to serve the church and the world.

Sometimes you will have rejoiced in their ministry. Sometimes you will have shared it, and sometimes you may have been frustrated by it, or even resented it. Forgive them. But don't be shy of reminding them that they have a vocation to their families as well as to the Church.

It has been a blessing to me to spend time with these, your new priests and deacons over the past few days. I am utterly certain that they will be a blessing to their ministry areas, to the Church and to you. With you, I pray with them, that their ministry will be a blessing to them as they become further more formed in the image of Christ: his hands, his feet, his compassionate gaze.