

# Homily given at the Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Patrick Lynch SS CC and Bishop Paul Hendricks

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At the heart of the rite of Episcopal ordination is the anointing of the bishops elect with the oil of Chrism. That oil is blessed here in the Cathedral every Maundy Thursday and is used throughout the diocese for conferring the sacraments of baptism, of confirmation, and ordination to the priesthood. Anointing therefore is something that binds us all together in the communion of the Church. In baptism we have become sons and daughters of God, in confirmation we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit for service in the Church, and ordination confers the gift of priesthood, a very specific vocation through which the sacramental life of the Church is sustained and continued.

Ordination to the Episcopate confers the fullness of the sacrament of orders and is vital for the continued life of the church. It is ordination to the episcopate that connects the church of today with apostolic times and with the foundation of the Church by Christ. Through the Apostolic succession, it secures and guarantees the future of the church in every place and in every generation. And there are two moments in that organic succession that we would fittingly remember today. One, of course, is that of St Methodius who we commemorate today, with his brother St. Cyril. Together they translated the liturgical books of the Church for the people of their time. When Methodius was made a bishop, he went to Hungary where he had to deal with conflict and oppression not least because of his work on the liturgical texts. But he was an apostle who was given and sent to the Church in Hungary and is recognised today as such both by Catholics and Orthodox

The second moment was much later; on 6th July 1851. That was when the first Bishop of Southwark, Thomas Grant, was consecrated in the chapel of the English College in Rome where he had been Rector. There had been disputes at time of the restoration of the Hierarchy not least about whether London should be one diocese. The Holy See resolved that issue by appointing

Bishop Grant to Southwark and so our diocese came into being. He was a very saintly man and we should be proud to have him as our founding father.

The Episcopate is therefore a gift of the Lord to the church and the ordination of new bishops is a source of new life for the church, and that is so today for this particular church of Southwark.

But how will this be realised? What exactly is being asked of those who are being ordained?

The Rite of Ordination is very clear. It reminds us that the men who have responded to this vocation are to model their ministry on Christ the Good Shepherd. They are to give their lives, their whole lives, to the people they serve. The prayer of consecration says 'May they be shepherds to your holy flock and high priests, blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day' So through a life of service of God and of those entrusted to them by God new life will come to our Church.

The readings we have heard in this Mass explore and further open up the reality of this ordination-what it means, what it involves, what it gives, and what it demands. The great passage from the prophecy of Isaiah says, 'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he has anointed me'. The anointing of a new bishop is an act of God rooted in God's choice and God's initiative. Anointing has always been that. We need only think, of the anointing of David as King of Israel by Samuel. Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint the one *God* had chosen, to fulfil God's purpose.

But most fundamentally, Jesus Christ, our great high priest makes these words of the prophet Isaiah his own when he preaches in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus who was baptised in the river Jordan, and identified as the Son of God explains to the people in the synagogue and to us the nature of his ministry and the meaning of his anointing, to

bring good news to the poor, to bring freedom, healing, release and strength.

It is to that ministry that our new bishops are called, and they are called to exercise it in this diocese in these times. Their anointing is for our day and our present reality as was the case for St Methodius and Bishop Grant.

The context in which we exercise our ministry is changing rapidly, the world is changing and we need great imagination, courage and confidence to engage with the pastoral realities that present themselves today. But this time, as I have said before, is *our* time, *our* opportunity. It is the right time for the ministry of Pat and Paul to enrich and strengthen the life of our church. And this is the right place for them to do that—the vast multicultural conurbation which is South London.

Closely associated with the rite of anointing is another moment of great significance in the rite of Ordination, when the Book of the Gospels is held over the heads of the bishops being ordained while the prayer of consecration is said. To them, it falls in a special way to preach the Gospel and to proclaim the Catholic faith. And just as they will bring their own particular experience and gifts to their Episcopal ministry, so they will bring their own voice to the preaching of the Gospel, preaching which must be original and personal but at the same time in continuity and complete fidelity to the faith of the Catholic Church through the ages. New voices articulating a message that is always old and always new.

The letter to the Ephesians which was read to us tells us something about the message that a bishop must always proclaim, and something that is important for us to hear today. We breathe the atmosphere of a climate of social conflict and adversarial politics, of parties and factions. The voice of a bishop must be a voice that speaks of peace, a voice that seeks to build up the unity of the Body of Christ, strong in condemnation of sin and injustice but not the voice of someone who represents a lobby or pressure group, a voice that respects and includes and a voice that seeks to consolidate and build up the unity of the Church.

A bishop must be one who confirms and affirms people in their faith. It is given to him and required of him to do that, to strengthen the faith that binds us together. This doesn't mean that he

can answer everything or that he can solve and resolve everything. It does mean that he trusts in the power of his anointing, trusts that God will give him the words that need to be said in whatever situation and whatever time he must speak.

A verse from the psalms occurs to me today as a very fitting prayer for a bishop 'Oh Lord, give your judgement to the King, to a King's Son your justice, that he may judge your people in truth, and your poor in right judgement'

But a Bishop who is a public figure must also reach out beyond the Catholic Church to deepen our communion with our fellow Christians in other Communion; reach out to those of other faiths and very especially to those who have no faith. He must evangelise, must bring Good news. Through their ministry the church will be as the Second Vatican Council says 'a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of unity for the whole human race.

So a costly, complex, but highly rewarding ministry is what they have embraced and I'm sure they will receive your prayers and support. I personally thank God and am grateful to the Holy See for the gift of two such excellent priests to this new ministry here in the diocese of Southwark. Finally I suggest that our prayers and our attitude throughout this Liturgy should be guided by the prayer of Christ in today's gospel 'Consecrate them in the truth, your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I now consecrate myself, that they too may be consecrated in the truth.'