

New Brighton, Sunday 3rd July 2022

4th Sunday after Pentecost

20th anniversary to the Sacred Priesthood of Canon Montjean

“Duc in altum”¹

Avance au large ! Pouss mo bato dan delo ! Launch out into the deep!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Cher Monsieur le Chanoine,
Chère Madame, Cher Monsieur,
Reverend Canons and Sisters,
Dear faithful,

“Ah! The priest is such a great honour! If we truly understood who he was, we would die, not because of fear, but love.”²

Twenty years of priesthood! How many joys? How many sufferings? How many masses and sacraments? We will probably never know for ourselves!

“Jam non dicam!” “I no longer call you servers, but friends!”³ You recognize the first words of the antiphon which conclude the ceremonies of the priestly ordination, while the power of confession is given and preceding the promise of obedience, in the hands of the bishop, staring at you!

This antiphon is not only a rite of our Holy Mother the Church, nor either a simple quotation of the Holy Scriptures, but it's a welcoming word from Jesus himself, who gave it to you, dear Canon, twenty years ago, on the 3rd July 2002, in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception of Gricigliano. In his great bounty, Jesus made you the honour to call you as His Priest forever, to come with Him and “launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught”.

No anymore servers, but friends: in these words, are all the directions of a true priestly life. Friendship, as used to say the ancient philosopher, is a unity in communion of thought and will. “I know my sheep, and they know me”⁴. This community of life within the intimacy of the soul of the priest, is essential for the well-balance of the man, chosen by God. Once more, our Holy Mother the Church offers us a lesson of spirituality within the Liturgy. Of course, Liturgy and Spirituality cannot be separated, as it's the official channel of the prayer of the Church. But

¹ Luke, V, 4.

² St Jean-Marie Vianney

³ John, XV, 15.

⁴ John, X, 14.

we can see here, in the ritual of the ceremonies of the ordination, a small aspect, an open door to the high level of friendship God is inviting the Priest on his ordination day.⁵

St Jean-Marie Vianney, with his usual simplicity made it even shorter, saying: “le Sacerdoce, c’est l’amour du Coeur de Jésus.” “The Priesthood is the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.” This same Sacred Heart who offered himself as a victim of love for the sinners, abandoned by His friends, alone on the calvary, but still and always united with God, because of the beatific vision of his divine life. So it is for the priest, who doesn’t belong to himself anymore, from the day of his ordination, as one day a father says to someone who came to congratulate him for the ordination of his son: “he’s no longer my son!” We do not belong anymore to anyone, because our attachment is only to Jesus, for the service of his Church, the salvation of souls and the celebration of the divine mysteries.

The Sacred Heart was alone upon the Cross, the priest is alone at the altar, above the congregation. The Sacred Heart saw God the Father all along the Sacrifice of the Cross. The priest hold Jesus with his consecrated hands, renewing the Sacrifice of the Cross, every day of his life, praying for the living and the dead, for all the worries of this life, and the spiritual welfare of the souls entrusted to his care, but also to bring back those who are not yet caught in the nets of the Love of Christ: those to be baptised, those to be received into the full communion, those to be converted, those to be brought back into the safe harbour of the Holy Church of God.

A Jesus was thinking about all of us, while dying upon the Cross, the Priest offers the Mass for the intentions of all the Church, renewing the perfect oblation of Christ.

Such a responsibility of being the intercessor of the visible Church, the instrument used by the Grace, could frighten anyone who doesn’t believe, or trust our divine Lord. There is for sure a part of craziness in taking such engagement at only 24 years old. But what else was the Lord asking to you, when he said: “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.”⁶

The answer of St Peter, we just read in the gospel, is this part of madness: “we laboured all night, and have taken nothing, but at thy word, I will let down the net.”⁷ I’m not worthy of that honour, but because you’re calling me, I’ll answer your voice, I’ll come to you, I’ll receive this burden. I’ve no idea where this will take me, but because of you, my Lord, I’ll come to you. Do with me whatever you need for your service!

The Lord sent the priest to help him to attract as many as possible people into the Church. They do the draught, on behalf of God, with his Grace. As St Peter, who didn’t catch anything the whole night, the action and ministry of the priests would be null, if Jesus wasn’t giving His Grace and mission. On the other hand, what a consolation and benediction of the pastoral work of the Church and Her priests! It’s not a human task! It’s the Saviour’s! What convert people is not human language and efforts to persuade, but the grace which is coming from above! The main role of the priest is to catch the fish, to take care of them, with the same love of Christ, and to keep them, within the safe protection of the Church.

⁵ Benedict XVI, homily for the imposition of the sacred pallium on metropolitan archbishops, 29th June 2011, Vatican basilica.

⁶ Luke, V, 4.

⁷ Luke, V, 5.

None of the efforts of this life to accomplish this task will be useless, and, as the apostle said this morning in his epistle, “the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory to come that will be revealed in us.”⁸

Our Lady, Mother of priests, truly understood this, as She was standing at the foot of the Cross. She united her to the sufferings of Her beloved Son, offering them for the sake of the world, for the salvation of souls, praying also for these who became, since two thousand tears “the living images of Her unique Son.”

She helped Jesus throughout her life on Earth, and she still help him in Heaven. She will always pray for us to have priest who will give us the Sacraments, explain to us Christ’s Gospel, and teach us to become true children of God.

“Virgin Mary, ask God to give us Priests, who we need so much, and since your heart has such power over him, obtain for us, O Mary, priests that are Saints!”⁹

Amen

⁸ Rom VIII, 18.

⁹ Father BrunoThévenin, Prière à Notre-Dame du Sacerdoce. Translation can be found: <https://icksp.org.uk/newbrighton/the-most-holy-rosary-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary/>