



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE PLENARY

ENGLAND & WALES

Episcopal Ordination of Mgr Nicholas Hudson

Homily: Cardinal Vincent Nichols

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL, LONDON, 4 JUNE 2014

I am so pleased to greet you all again as we gather round Mgr Nicholas and take part in his ordination as a bishop. This is a rich and powerful ceremony and there are so many ways of reflecting on it. This morning I start with the chrism and the anointing from which Jesus takes his title as 'the Christ', the 'Anointed One', a reality of grace in which we are invited to share. Indeed, being anointed with chrism is an essential part of our discipleship.

We are anointed with chrism on our forehead at our baptism as we are incorporated into the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We received the chrism again at confirmation to strengthen us for our lives as missionary disciples. Those who are ordained priests are anointed with chrism on their hands for the Lord wants to use those hands as his own. Today, Mgr Nicholas Hudson will be anointed with chrism on the crown of his head, a sign through which the grace and character of episcopal ordination is conferred upon him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed the journey through life of each of us, in faithfulness to Christ, is always the work of the Holy Spirit. Only through the power of that Spirit, is faith planted in our souls. Only through the Holy Spirit can we take to heart the transforming Word of God: that Jesus, the Word made flesh has conquered death and in that way completely transforms the horizons of our daily lives. Now we see beyond death. We live each day in the hope and promise of eternity.

As you know, chrism comes from the olive tree. We do well to remember, then, that the promise made to Noah was conveyed to him by a branch of an olive tree. That branch, carried to the ark by a dove, was the promise of life beyond the flood that had so overtaken the world (Gen 8.11). The fruit of the olive gives us the promise of peace and new life, stronger than any flood of sin or despair that might seem to overwhelm us.

In order to make chrism, olive oil is mingled with sweet balsam, because everyone anointed with chrism is to be a fragrant gift to God, made so, transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Let's look more closely at the use of chrism in the ordination of Bishop Nicholas.

Its use is described as 'a mystical anointing', for through it the bishop is bound more deeply into the mystery of God, that marvellous pattern of sacrament and teaching by which God draws us into himself. This new bishop is, then, to be 'a fragrant offering' which we make to God today.

This anointing is also connected with authority and kingship. Both Saul and David are anointed kings by the use of chrism (1 Kings 10.1 & 16.1) and in our prayer today we ask explicitly for the gift of that 'governing Spirit' given only from the power of God.

In this ceremony it is the new bishop's head that is anointed. He is now to be shaped fully in the person of Christ the Head for this ordination is the completion of the sacrament of Holy Orders, expressed in deacon and priest but fulfilled in the bishop.

This anointing is accompanied by other powerful signs: the holding of the Book of the Gospels over the head of the new bishop forming a tent, or tabernacle of God's presence which can alone secure the ability of the bishop to lead with 'unfailing patience and sound teaching.'

On his head, now covered in oil, is placed the mitre which we may take as a sign of that governing spirit with which he is endowed.

And the new bishop receives a ring, calling him to fidelity to the bride, which is the Church.

Through this anointing, the bishop, you Nicholas, are now bound so closely to Christ, the Bridegroom, that you look on the Church, on us all, with the eyes and the love of Christ himself. With this anointing you change posts, as it were, now standing with the Bridegroom. That is why we see in the bishop a special presence of our beloved Lord.

And the pastoral staff reminds him, and us, of his duty as a shepherd, of the duty of the endless watchfulness of the shepherd, always seeking out what is good for the Church, fresh pastures, safety from danger, strength in being held together in unity.

The dramatic actions of this Sacred Liturgy are also expressed with power and beauty in the words we have already heard, the words through which God speaks to us today and which we are to take to heart.

St Paul, writing to his beloved Timothy, reminds him, and us, that this action is the work of God, who 'gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.' And the purpose of the gift is so clear: that we are to be preachers, apostles, teachers of the risen Christ who abolished death and brought life and immortality into our lives through the Gospel.

It is in the Gospel passage, however, that the heart of our life in Christ is so beautifully made clear. 'Do you love me?' - the one question that really matters for us all! 'Peter, do you love me more than these?' A question addressed not in order to elicit precedence or privilege or any cause for boasting, but simply the measure of the service that Peter's going to give. He, who denied his Master three times, professes his love three times and is told that he will now be taken where he rather would not go.

Now that, of course, is not a comment on the Diocese of Westminster! Rather it is an unmistakable sign that discipleship is costly. We may like to think that we have chosen to follow The Lord, to enthrone him as our Master. But in fact he has chosen us, and he will do with us just whatever he wants, for the sake of his kingdom.

So, Nicholas, welcome to this Diocese. Thank you, again, to the Diocese of Southwark for this gift. God sees that it is good for you to be amongst us here. Who are we to say or do anything other than to rejoice in his will and welcome you with whole hearts and open arms? You are here for the sake of his kingdom and in receiving you as his gift we know that we need you, your goodness, your experience, your clarity of mind but most of all your love of The Lord.

So now, with great cheerfulness, let us proceed with this episcopal ordination.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster