

# Journey of discipleship

Homily at the ordination of four Church of Ireland deacons on  
Sunday 18 September in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin

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May I speak in God's name who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It is my privilege to be with you to-day, on this important Sunday in the celebrations of the year of Come & See, but especially on the happy occasion of the ordination Anne, Rebecca, Stuart and Tom. This is a public affirmation of God working in their lives and their generous response. We are caught up in that great mystery of God asking them to work with him in building up his Kingdom. We are challenged to reflect on our own call to discipleship which we share with them.

The ceremony today presents three dimensions of the role of the deacon –the word, the liturgy and the service of charity – and also three dimensions of the journey each of us is called to make in our discipleship. The newly ordained deacons will continue to deepen their own discipleship in these areas and to-day take on a new role as a way of accompanying others on that journey at a particularly challenging time for the Church.

Very few of us experience the call to discipleship in the dramatic way that Isaiah did in the first reading, yet we share elements of that call. The first dimension of our journey is inwards, to the depth of our own being, to let God touch and transform our human weakness. Isaiah saw God in the glory of his heavenly kingdom. We see him in the great cathedral of his creation. Our familiarity with the word of scripture directs us to the drama of God's presence in our world and our lives. Our discipleship seeks the wisdom that goes beyond the superficial to the drama of God loving and caring for us. We let God open up a sense of wonder that captures our minds and our hearts. We seek to avoid insensitivity so as not to miss out on God's invitation. We fight against self-deception lest we be blind and misinterpret God's presence. A key role for the deacon and the priest today is to accompany others on their journey, opening the scriptures to them so that, like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, their hearts burn within them.

The journey of discipleship is always undertaken along with other believers, and this is the second dimension of our journey. St. Paul points to the rich tapestry of gifts in the Church community as bringing people together as children of the one God. Church liturgy, especially the Eucharist, celebrates the diversity, and the unity, of gifts. As deacons and priests, these candidates will play a special role in leading that liturgy and building up community. Unfortunately, the pursuit of individual gifts can often be divisive. Our world is characterised by different tyrannies. The tyranny of majorities who demand conformity from others in order to preserve their own privilege; the tyranny of minorities who demand special treatment in a way that undermines others. We are flooded with media images that portray irreconcilable differences between communities and individuals caught up in a selfish pursuit

of excess privilege. In this social environment, discipleship requires a language that speaks of hope, reconciliation, mutual understanding and community in a new and creative way.

Jesus faced similar tensions in his own time. He challenged the powerful Pharisee group that sought to impose a legalist interpretation on discipleship. He re-educated a minority group who wanted a military Messiah. In to-day's gospel we find he also had to deal with two disciples who sought honour and privilege as a reward for their service. Jesus' response was to point to the primacy of service based on compassion, a service that would bring them on a third journey, out of their own community to be witnesses to the whole world. This service is one that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick and those in prison. It also counteracts the narrowmindedness of fundamentalism. I am not talking here simply of a theological fundamentalism that is intolerant of other beliefs and seeks to confine God to the narrow sectarianism of one's own views. To-day, there is a need to engage with the fundamentalism of science, and to let the religious imagination engage with new discoveries in cosmology, medicine and the social sciences where it will find a creative and loving God. There is the need to engage with the fundamentalism that values the human person only as an economic unit of production, giving rise to the exclusion of certain groups from sharing in a society's wealth. There is a political fundamentalism that seeks to exclude all aspects of religion from public debate. The call of service is to open people's minds to the way some philosophies and structures can oppress, impoverish and disempower both those who hold these philosophies and their victims, as well as reaching out and ministering to those victims.

A disciple strives to be like the master. In our familiarity with the Word and our participation in liturgy we grow in our ability to see the world as God sees it. In our service of neighbour and care of creation, we strive to love the world as God loves it. To-day we are encouraged in our own discipleship as we witness the ordination of Anne, Rebecca, Stuart and Tom. As they take on a new role of journeying with and serving the community, we are invited to pray for them. Above all, we are invited to give thanks for their generous response to God, and to give glory to the God who continues to call all of us to work with Him in building up his Kingdom.