

Ordination of Anthony Briody to the priesthood
Feast of the Assumption, 15th August, 2019

Gathering

We gather here in the first place as the people of God in the Diocese of Raphoe, Bishop, priests, religious and lay faithful, to honour the great mother of God, Mary most holy, in her glorious Assumption.

We gather around Anthony Briody who is to become a priest today. At the heart of this gathering today is his family, his father Liam and his sister and brothers. His beloved mother, Sylvia is surely with us in spirit. There are all those relatives and friends who have walked with Anthony and with his family over the years; people from his home parish of Glenties; friends who have been part of Anthony's journey through his education and his professional life; people who have journeyed with him through his priestly formation in Maynooth, in Rome and more recently in Belfast.

We gather in from all over Donegal, from across Ireland. I extend a special welcome to family and friends who have crossed seas and oceans to be here.

Our presence signifies our communion with Anthony and our esteem for the priesthood and priestly service.

We pray fervently in this mass for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Anthony; we are bold enough to ask that in his life as a priest he will be like an icon making Jesus present to those around him.

HOMILY

When the practicalities of choosing a date for the ordination arose and the window of mid to late August emerged the Feast of the Assumption presented itself as a possibility. Today is a Thursday and there were reasons advanced as to why a Sunday would be more practical. Anthony was clear that he would love to be ordained on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady.

That means, Anthony, that your priesthood will be forever linked in your mind, and in fact, with the great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy and with her Assumption into Heaven.

Mary has passed beyond death and judgement, and lives wholly in the Age to Come. The Resurrection of the Body ... has in her case been anticipated and is already an accomplished fact. That does not mean, however, that she is dissociated from the rest of humanity and placed in a wholly different category: for we all hope to share one day in that same glory of the Resurrection of the Body which she enjoys even now.

Mary lives wholly in the Age to Come. The Age to Come, where Mary already is, is our destiny. We heard St Paul say it to the Corinthians: "Just as all men die in Adam, so all men will be brought to life in Christ." Our link to this new life in Christ is hope. A good priest is one who lives and speaks of this hope not just in his words but in his very being. What is this hope that we are called to live? It is not a rueful wish that it might be so, hedged in by lots of maybes. Our hope is a choice to live now today with a joy and confidence that says: 'In my body I shall look on God my Saviour.'

The good priest is one who lives this hope in the world as it is, not as it should be. He does not run away from the sorrow and pain that is all around. He is not overwhelmed by the weakness and sin that he confronts in his own heart and in the hearts and lives of the people he ministers to. Mary gives a beautiful example of the necessary stance. At Cana in Galilee she was present in a situation where things were going wrong and the feast would be destroyed. Mary is living in the present reality as it is; 'They have no wine.' She is also living in the future. She doesn't need to say it because it is implied; 'there **will be** wine for the feast.'

The Cana scene is a fabulous one, pregnant with inspiration and grace and full of irony. The Son of God appears not to see the problem while his blessed mother does, and with extraordinary delicacy she plays an irreplaceable part in revealing God's glory. It is she who tells the servants; 'do whatever he tells you'. They do what he tells them and there is wine for the feast away beyond anything anybody had any right to expect.

There is humour in that story. Jesus, at Mary's instigation, gave that crowd six big vats full of first class wine; we are talking 100 gallons of wine; enough wine to have the whole of Galilee on its ear for about six months. 'You want wine, says Jesus. I'll give you wine!'

I had a sister Paula who died of cancer that carried her off in a matter of weeks. She was the mother of a big family who had lots of sorrows as many people do. Her married life coincided with the Troubles. She got married in 1967 just before they began. They were always there in the background. There was nothing fancy or overblown about her piety but she was rooted in the faith. She spoke to me once about a good priest and she loved being at mass when he was there. My ears picked up and I was dying to know what it was that made an impression on somebody as deep as our Paula. I was disappointed with the answer. I wanted to hear about prayerful liturgy and deep theology, grounded in real life. I don't know if that was there or not, but Paula didn't refer to any of that. It seems that the priest often said something witty. 'He makes us smile', she said. Paula had a sense that she left the Church with a spring in her step because of him.

You cannot put that on. If you try to, it will fall flat. But, a good Pastor will know his people. Like Mary at Cana he will care for the people and he will know what they need. Who would have thought that what the people in Cana needed from Jesus the Son of God that day was 'more wine'?! If you stay close to Mary in her care for the people you are called to serve she will lead you to see all kinds of things you never expected. Isn't Cana a beautiful metaphor for a parish? Mary quietly watching out for what is needed to lead us to the future; she is priming the servants to listen to whatever Jesus says; and then all sorts of people are going off doing their part to make sure that there will be a feast and that it will be mighty.

Pope Francis wrote a beautiful letter to Priests last week for the Feast of the Curé of Ars. Towards the end he speaks of Mary as the powerful model of every Christian life. He starts with her hymn of praise that we heard just now in the Gospel;

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (*Lk 1:46*)

‘How can we speak about gratitude and encouragement without looking to Mary? She, the woman whose heart was pierced (cf. *Lk 2:35*), teaches us the praise capable of lifting our gaze to the future and restoring hope to the present. Her entire life was contained in her song of praise (cf. *Lk 1:46-55*). We too are called to sing that song as a promise of future fulfilment.’

He gives you a beautiful image of time spent in prayer with Mary:

‘Whenever I visit a Marian shrine, I like to spend time looking at the Blessed Mother and letting her look at me. I pray for a childlike trust, the trust of the poor and simple who know that their mother is there, and that they have a place in her heart. And in looking at her, to hear once more, like the Indian Juan Diego: “My youngest son, what is the matter? Do not let it disturb your heart. Am I not here, I who have the honour to be your mother?”

To contemplate Mary is “to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves”.

I leave you with one last thought:

Our Lady “is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice ... As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God’s love”.