

My dear brothers in the priesthood,

The church where I was ordained a priest is no longer there. Shortly after I was ordained they pulled it down and tarmacked over it. Now it's a car park. Perhaps they were trying to tell me something. The new parish church in my home town is nice - but it's not got that visceral connection for me. So I miss a little not being able to see the place where I was ordained. But I still think about the moment itself, especially at someone else's Ordination to the priesthood.

And today is a bit like that too; it's a day when I'm sure many of us look back and remember our Ordination. Each of us here took the decision freely to answer God's call to the priesthood. We offered ourselves completely, to love and serve Him and his people.

Looking back at the Rite of Ordination,

- We promised "to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously, as the Church has handed them down".
- We promised "to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the gospel and explaining the Catholic faith".
- We promised "to consecrate [our lives] to God for the salvation of his people".
- We promised obedience to the Bishop.
- Earlier, as *diaconandi*, we promised to remain celibate "in lifelong service to God and mankind".

And I am certain that all of us here promised all of these things very happily, very joyfully.

Unless you're a consecrated man or woman, I'm not quite sure that you'll understand what that feels like. To give yourself honestly, perfectly, wholeheartedly,

purely, completely to God and his service is the most joyful thing you can do. And as priests, surely our ordination was the happiest day of our life.

It is true that, in discerning in us a vocation to the priesthood, the Church then demands of us a great deal, but if you are well disposed and well trained, then you will have a more than fair chance to be a good and happy and holy priest.

Lately, it's not been easy to be a priest, in Scotland and elsewhere. There have been scandals, mostly due to men not living up to their promises, and that is something, in the real world, that will never be far away. The Church acknowledges this: even the prayer of consecration of a priest asks God to send us holy priests "for we are weak and our need is greater".

I was working in New York just after the worst of the Boston child abuse crisis became known. To go to work I had a 15 minute walk through midtown Manhattan, down 42nd Street past Grand Central Terminal, so, not exactly in the quietest part of the city, and I had to do this with a black suit and a collar, of course. I walked along kept my head down and didn't meet people's gaze till I got to the other end of a very long walk. I don't quite know what kind of reception I expected but for any of you that have been to NY, you know that anything can happen. Well, I got a ticking off from someone on a bus one time, but apart from that, people were actually very positive and supportive. Men working in the street, a down and out lying in a doorway, saying "God bless you, Father!" helped me learn that, maybe folk saw something that I didn't - that it took a little bit of courage to be out there and dressed as a priest in those days, and maybe they were saying, stick with it, hang in there.

Not so long ago I came across news about a group of people who were surveyed about their job satisfaction; unusually, they also tested priests in their sample. To everyone's astonishment, the priests came out miles ahead of everyone else in terms of job satisfaction - and that in spite of the fact that we're paid very little, our conditions are

uncertain, the media coverage of us can be merciless and many on the outside suppose that the Church and its priests and our morale are all washed up.

Perhaps the thing is that it is difficult to measure success, or that we measure success in a different way. Priests don't judge their success as the world does. We don't measure the size of our house or where we live or the size of our wallets against the next man's. We are not called to make £100k a year but, as the Rite of Ordination says, "to model our lives on the mystery of the Lord's cross". We are called to be *puri*, men perfectly singleminded in the service of the Lord. Perfectly singleminded. In every part of our lives. One of the greatest priests of the nineteenth century, St John Vianney, used to say "Only Christ matters". He was spectacularly unsuccessful as a seminarian and as a student. He was not a success by several measures. But he was focussed on Christ alone, and at his death he was one of the most respected priests of his generation. So he wasn't successful intellectually or academically. But he was something else. He was faithful.

Mother Theresa is supposed famously to have said, "We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful". Now here is an insight, worthy of examination. We are called to be faithful. We are not called to work in the nicest parish, in the nicest part of the diocese, to live and work in situations that suit our talents and experience, or even beside people we like. All of that is nice, and we all like nice, but we know deep down that it's not important. We should be able to give up all the nice stuff, and still be happy, serene, humble, obedient priests.

The young man who got ordained all those years ago was called to model his life on the mystery of the Lord's cross: he was called not be successful, but to be faithful.

Today, as you revisit those promises that you took at ordination, remember the joy and enthusiasm for Christ, for his people, for the mission at hand, and the selfless dedication that you freely placed on the altar, that you gave in joyful sacrifice to the Lord. I will certainly pray that for you today, as I pray for you every day.

And please pray for me. I have a lot to learn and will surely make mistakes, but please know that all that I do for you in this present task is intended to help you be faithful, happy and fulfilled in your life as men and as priests; to help you be an example of holiness, goodness and simplicity; and to help you be the priests that the Lord has called you to be.

We are not called to be successful. But we are called to be faithful, as men and as priests.