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Dear Friends,

'Sing praises to the Lord O you his faithfull ones, and give thanks to his Holy Name'
Psalm 30 verse 4

I write to you today, less than 24 hrs away from attending my pre-ordination retreat. As I sit at my desk, I read through the scriptures for Sunday's service to see how the Word inspires me, but it seems that my mind has stopped working. In fact, the only thoughts that are running through my head are of the up-and-coming ordination on Saturday, the declarations that will be made, and the words of consecration, and by the time you read this letter it will be that very day.

Pre-Covid ordinations would normally take place at Petertide in the Cathedral (generally the last Saturday in June). The week leading up to this is dedicated in the Lectionary to what's known as Ember days, which are quarterly periods of prayer and fasting in the liturgical calendar of Western Christian churches. They are a time set aside to pray for all people and to give thanks for their ministries. I believe that we are all called to different ministries at different times in our lives. Some are called to be parents, some teachers, some carers, some leaders and so forth, for we are all one in the body of Christ. We are all a royal priesthood. So may I ask that you pray for people in the Province of Wales, for those who have already been ordained, who will be ordained today, and ordained over the coming months?

Traditionally many would attend a Pre-ordination retreat; an opportunity to carve out time to focus on what lies ahead. All our lives contain significant transition points and it is at these times we are to take stock and rededicate ourselves afresh. Normally, those who are about to be ordained deacons and priests in Llandaff Diocese would go on retreat to Llangasty and be led by either a bishop, archdeacon, or a cleric with experience in that field. It would be a time to worship, to pray, to give thanks, and simply be together. This year, that takes a different form. Some will meet, others will go it alone, but it is comforting to know that we will all engage with the digital addresses that have been lovingly prepared for us by Bishop Dominic. This will connect us and gather us as a people spiritually.

Last year was a year like no other and our ordinations to the diaconate took place in the Cathedral with no family, friends, or celebration and not much time to prepare. Many of you expressed your disappointment for me, but I felt disappointed for you and all those who have walked alongside me, those who have encouraged me when I felt that I didn't want to carry on, those who reminded me to trust when I wanted to turn away. Despite all this, it was a day filled with intimacy and joy, but what brings me most joy is that this year we get to gather physically together as a church community.



2020 Post Ordination

Over the last few weeks, so many of you have approached me with such kind words and good wishes. Many have said that you will be unable to attend as you go to spend time with your families after this difficult year, and you have all reassured me of your prayers. On the occasions when I have had an opportunity to speak with you the conversation has begun with a question. How are you feeling? Are you excited? My response has been the same each time. I don't know how I feel, it all seems to be happening so quickly, I haven't had time to think about it really, or I have mixed feelings. Well, I can now say I have one word that explains how I feel – overwhelmed. I am overwhelmed by the responsibility that lies ahead, the faith that others seem to have when I don't feel that I have it in myself. I am overwhelmed by the promises that will be made and the trust given.

These words of the examination which takes place in the service, I think, explain why I feel this way.

'Remember with thanksgiving that this ministry now to be entrusted to you is a sharing in the ministry of him who died on the cross. It will require sacrifice and bring suffering, but, lived faithfully, it will also bring you joy and peace. You will need determination and perseverance, and because you cannot fulfil this ministry in your own strength, pray that each day the Lord will renew your calling that you may follow the Good Shepherd wherever he leads.'

The feeling of being overwhelmed is something we all can identify with, and it's something that works on many levels. I am overwhelmed by your love and support. I am overwhelmed by the care and attention that I have received from everyone. In fact, last Sunday a few of us stood chatting outside Church, laughing and smiling together, and those of you who were there will remember the emotion hit me as I retreated into church.

I am overwhelmed by the beautiful home in which we find ourselves, overwhelmed by the surrounding woodland and countryside. As I take my dog, Hector, on his daily walk I enter the woodland where there's a beautiful stream. Yesterday the water ran clear and trickled slowly, today the water is gushing and murky, and tomorrow will be a new day and the water will change again.

The feeling of being overwhelmed is part of being human as it connects us with each other and with our world. This is often echoed in the Psalms, the poems and prayers of our ancestors. Rowan Williams says that poems and prayers are close cousins. I have just finished reading *'On Priesthood'* by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell (pre-ordination recommended reading) who has led many retreats and he asks the ordinands to meditate on a passage of scripture, and then write a poem. Many say that they are not poets, so they write a prayer, and in his experience the two are similar, but what is interesting is the practice allows the innermost feelings to be expressed and they are Psalmic in nature. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, speaks of how the Psalms mirror the different phases of our lives. We begin settled or orientated, giving thanks to God, then something changes or happens and we become disorientated, a time of lament, of crying out to God for help, and then through God's grace there is a return to a new reorientation and to praise.

I will be retreating to Tenby for a few days, armed with the journal Vicki gave me last year when I was ordained deacon, a bible to read the Psalms and my phone, only to listen to prepared addresses, and a few books, one of which is called *'The Showing of Julian of Norwich'*. In this book the author, Mirabai Stars, reflects on Julian of Norwich's works of *'Divine Love'*. I leave you with some of her words, which beautifully sum up just how I feel.

'at times there is such a diversity of feelings which can be overwhelming and yet, in those moments are when we sense the presence of God, we surrender to him, truly willing to be with him, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.'

Love in Christ

Belinda