

**Sermon preached at the Episcopal Ordination and Consecration  
of the Right Reverend Adrian Wilkinson  
on Sunday, 30th October 2022 in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin  
by the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

**Embargoed against delivery on Sunday 30th October 2022 at 3.30 p.m.**

Many of us met here on 23rd June. Adrian Wilkinson was elected to the office and work of a bishop in the Church of God. We're here today for his episcopal ordination and consecration. It's a big occasion - how do we know that? There are lots of Cork people here, led by our Lord Mayor. It's not my role as a preacher to eulogise Adrian in life or to beatify him before he breaks for the border of Dublin and braces himself for the drive back down the M9 to Kilkenny to begin this ministry. In any case, he's not an unknown quantity. His track record over the last 20 years in Cork, as Archdeacon since 2014, his previous ministry in Meath and Kildare, and his first curacy, also in Cork, are all well-known to you, as has been his involvement in Church life generally. It's not my job either to 'big him up', so to speak, to launch him into this new ministry - that task of equipping is God's, God the Holy Trinity, beginning in this ancient and symbolic liturgy this afternoon. It is my task, however, to preach a sermon - in this context, given these particular portions of Holy Scripture assigned for this liturgy. I didn't choose them; they are a given. It's my responsibility, therefore, as the preacher invariably does, to accept them, to work through them prayerfully, and to proclaim good news for this moment.

The lawyer in me was seriously tempted to take, as my text, the opening words of today's Psalm

'Great is the peace that they have who love thy law:.' *Psalm 119.165a*

With a captive audience here, of the great and good of the Church of Ireland, I could've had a field day rehabilitating the place of law among all you sceptics who regard law as a burdensome nuisance. Think of all those affirmations I could make; about the law being there to empower the sort of Church, within our Anglican polity - Catholic and Reformed - that God calls us to be; how it energises our mission and ministry. All of this, and more, would have been right up my street.

Our reading from Numbers was equally tempting with its resonances of vocation, being chosen, hands being laid on, for service within a community of the faithful: '... appoint someone over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd... a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him.' (*Numbers 27.16, 17 and 18*) Plenty of scope there too!

No - neither of those made the cut. Instead I want to talk to you, first, about plastic ducks: specifically this one. During the recent Lambeth Conference, Susan picked this one up at the Canterbury Cathedral shop. Now, I also happen to know (and some of you may have seen on social media) that Adrian was also given one of these by the children of Saint Luke's National School, Douglas as one of their parting gifts to him. Guess who organised that! I state the obvious when I say that his rubber duck bishop is identical to mine. And there were 100s of copycat ones in the shop: shaped by the same mould and mass-produced - erroneously, of course, because, as everyone knows, as my episcopal colleagues here definitely know, there is no such thing, properly speaking, as a purple mitre. The Bishops of Meath, Derry or Connor will, I am sure, be happy to explain all this to you about mitres at the tea afterwards.

Jesting aside, it's worth emphasising that bishops do not come from one single mould. No bishop is the copy of another. We are human beings with frailties, vulnerabilities and, hopefully also, with a sprinkling of charisms from God. But there is no identikit bishop - and if there were, such a bishop would be soulless and not very effective. Such an automaton, 'Stepford Wives' type of bishop' would not reflect the glory of what it means to be made in the image of God, or the vulnerability and uniqueness of what it means to live in the flesh, as God himself did, in Jesus: the incarnation.

God has called you, Adrian, as you are. You are not to become the mould of some other person's way of being bishop or of thinking you should be a bishop. People of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, that is how you must receive him and partner him. He's not a ready-made bishop. Indeed, there's no training to be a bishop. I still haven't been trained to be a bishop. ("That's obvious' I hear some of you say). We learn on the journey. There are courses you can go on, but by then it's too late. This is ministry, it is pilgrimage, it is vocation - it needs to be received, treasured and explored as such; by you all together.

And this plastic duck episode does, believe it or not, bring me back to today's texts. This uniqueness of our humanity - this fragility and vulnerability of our relationship with Jesus on this journey is seen in the person of Saint Peter, and supremely so in the encounter in today's Gospel between him and the risen Lord. We know how Peter, in spite of indignantly, promising otherwise, denied Jesus three times, how he let Jesus down ... and what we are seeing now in today's Gospel is clearly a fresh start. All of us have the potential again and again to make fresh starts in response to the invitation of Jesus, who already loves us, to love him. In today's Gospel, across the centuries, the voice of Jesus still sounds and he asks each of us here today 'Do you love me?' 'Do you love me?'

And what is significant, I think, about this encounter is that Jesus does not call Peter, Peter. He goes right back to the beginning, to when they first met. He was standing with Andrew and John and Jesus walked by. What Jesus calls him now is what Jesus called him then, at the outset: 'Simon son of John.' That was when he gave him a new name 'Cephas... which is translated Peter.' The entirety of Peter's past and his journey since with Jesus, is encapsulated in this moment of a fresh start. Don't expect your bishop, your bishops,

your clergy, or any other fellow disciple, for that matter, to be any better than Saint Peter. Humanity is fragile. God calls human beings to discipleship and to ministry, to fresh start after fresh start.

Saint Paul alludes to this fragility in our second reading: 'But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.' *2 Corinthians 4.7* And, moreover, we too '... are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies ....'

In every age people have lived through such challenges. It is into such a time now that you, Adrian, are being called to be a bishop and that all of us together are called to be God's people - the Church - proclaiming Good News. And that is why, meandering through all these texts assigned for today, having been tempted by the Psalm, and having been refreshed by the fresh start held out to us all in today's Gospel encounter, between Simon Son of John and Jesus, and seeing the human solidarity of St Paul in the words I have, just quoted, I settled ultimately on one sentence among all today's inspiring readings to leave with you and to highlight. It's this - the first sentence of the second reading:

'Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' *2 Corinthians 4.1*

We live in times when many lose heart indeed, many have lost heart or risk losing heart - and such people are not other people - the objects of our pastoral activity, they are frequently ourselves, or our co-workers in the Gospel, and fellow disciples on this journey. In the context of a pandemic and a war on our continent, with so many economic, commercial and political uncertainties, challenges such as migration, poverty, homelessness, human fears and practical concerns, with all these and many more, you do not need me to spell out why there are many who are struggling not to 'lose heart.'

This is the jazz weekend in Cork. The American Jazz Saxophonist, John Coltrane, whose creativity frequently took on a spiritual dimension, said that it often takes a 'lonely persistence' ... 'to create anything of beauty, daring, and substance that makes the world see itself afresh.' That's our challenge, for the sake of the Gospel, in a world that is being shaped and manipulated by online algorithms beyond the understanding of most of us. It's a paradoxical time of, on the one hand, online radicalisation of minds, and on the other hand, the angry and indignant online discourse which translates into nothing creative and ends up down the siding of keyboard inertia and abuse. How do we get Church people also to translate their virtual energy on social media - Facebook likes, emoticons, opinions and rants into transformative energy and action for the sake of the Kingdom of God? We won't fulfil the Five Marks of Mission with online clicks.

'Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' *2 Corinthians 4.1*

And, of course, Saint Paul has told us clearly what 'this ministry' is. He has told us in the previous chapter. It is the ministry of the new covenant. God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus. The day of salvation has come. The activity of the Spirit of God is seen in the lives of believers. It is a ministry that brings righteousness - it won't fade - it will last. All of this, says Saint Paul, gives us hope and this hope emboldens us. 'Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold...' he said ( *2 Corinthians 3.12*) Speaking to Cork clergy recently, the New Testament scholar, Paula Gooder, reflecting about a number of scripture passages said that in the case of each of them 'Nothing external happens to enable hope to happen. That which should transform everything has already happened. ... Hope is running rampant in the world. The question is whether we can join with it. There is hope because God is there. Jesus is there.'

'Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' *2 Corinthians 4.1*

We are called not to lose heart; not to give up; - why? Because of God's love and mercy. Later on in this letter Paul is quite open and frank about his own vulnerability and his weaknesses (*2 Corinthians 11.28*) He lists an entire catalogue of the challenges and predicaments he encountered; the opposition he faced - beatings, stoned, shipwrecked, lost at sea, constantly on the move - in danger from rivers, bandits, his own countrymen, in danger in the city, in the country - sleepless nights, hard work, cold, naked, hunger, and 'Besides everything else, ' he says 'I faced the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches.' Sounds, to me, pretty much like a normal diocese!

The Ordinal sets out what is not a mould but a template for the ministry of a bishop in such a world in which we are to minister while not losing heart. . It is timeless. 'Bishops are called ...' And then these words and phrases: 'serving', caring for the people of God', 'working with them', 'oversight, 'chief pastors, 'special responsibility to further the unity of the Church', 'discipline', 'guard the faith', 'promote mission', 'duty', 'watching over and praying', 'teach', 'govern', 'speaking in the name of God' (that's why I give our politicians such a hard time), 'interpreting the Gospel', 'ordain', 'sending new ministers, baptising and confirming, presiding at Holy Communion, leading worship - being merciful in discipline, special care for the sick, outcast and needy, and to those who turn to God they are to declare the forgiveness of sins.' Don't become passive while the Archbishop reads all this - pay attention to it all while it is being read.

I remember my first visit to a school as a Bishop. 'What do bishops do?' I asked earnestly. One young lad in West Cork - Mikey was his name - chirped up 'Not very much - you go around a lot, visiting places and eating dinners' In schools I often try to explain what an overseer is - a ministry of oversight and partnership. Let us remember please - that the task of oversight is not exercised by the bishop on his or her own. Ministry is entrusted to all of us - it is a God-given calling, responsibility, opportunity and joy passed to all of us together. Yes, these are tough times and the calling is daunting, but 'Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.' *2 Corinthians 4.1*