

Homily at Vince Onesi's Ordination – 13 December 2008

We gather to do a holy thing. Today Vince receives the sacrament of Holy Order and becomes a priest. So let's reflect on what this means.

Where do we look to see what it means? We look to Jesus of Nazareth, because He is the way, the truth and the life. To understand any aspect of our faith we look to Him.

And so you ask me: bishop, when you look at Jesus what do you see? I see the Holy One, whose life of faithfulness was an acceptable offering to God. I see our High Priest, who gives us a sure pathway to God.

And so you ask: is this what Vince will be – a holy man who represents us before God? I say yes; but wait! *All* the baptised are called to be holy. St Peter said of *all of us* that we are a “royal priesthood, a holy nation...” *All* are called to live lives that are an acceptable offering to God. Through baptism, we are *all* a “priestly people”.

And so you say: look again, bishop, and tell us what you see. I see Jesus being *sent* by the Father, speaking words that save; being called the “Anointed One” i.e. the Christ, the One who was *sent*.

And so you ask: is that what Vince will be, a man sent by God? I say, yes, but wait: all the consecrated people of God are *sent*. St Peter went on to say that this consecrated people has been “set apart to proclaim the wonderful things that God is doing”; *all* share Christ's mission; the *whole people* of God is meant to be a sign to the nations of their wonderfully destiny; we have *all* been anointed through Baptism and Confirmation.

And so you say: look again bishop and tell us what you see. I see Jesus casting out devils, healing the sick, exercising power over evil, and I recognise these as signs that God's reign has come among us; signs of the peace the prophets promised.

And so you ask: is that what Vince will be: a sign of God's reign? I say yes, but wait: through Baptism, *all* God's people share in Christ's victory over sin and death; *all* are a sign of God's reign; *all* are to be peace-makers through the works of justice; we are *all* given power over the forces of evil. We are all a royal priesthood.

And so you ask again: bishop are you saying that we are all called to the priestly role of living holy lives; to the prophetic role of proclaiming the wonderful things God is doing; and the royal role of bringing in God's reign?

I say yes, and there is no dignity greater than becoming sons and daughters of God, which we become in Baptism, there is no mission greater than Christ's mission, which we share through Confirmation, and there is no banquet greater than sitting at table with Christ. These are the greatest things that could happen to anyone, and they have happened to all of us.

And so you ask: what then is special about what Vince becomes today? I say: there is still something very special: this consecrated, holy, missioned people has needs of its own. I see Christ in their midst – the servant of all, forgiving, nurturing, lifting up,

giving hope, feeding with his body and blood, giving life, empowering. In other words I see Jesus the *Good Shepherd* among his people.

Like the Good Shepherd, the ordained priest unites his flock, and gives his life for them. He leads by holding up to them the mirror of God's word, so that they can see and recognise their own gifts. He helps them to name their gifts and use them.

And so you ask: is this then what Vince will become? I say yes, this is it. The ordained person simply *makes present* what Christ himself is doing. The Church did not take over where Christ left off; the apostles did not take over where Christ left off; we do not take over where Christ left off, because Christ has never left off! We only give voice to what *He is still doing*.

So when the priest says your sins are forgiven, it is Christ who forgives. When the priest says this is my body, this is my blood, it is Christ who is saying it; when the priest proclaims the gospel, it is Christ who speaks to his people.

All this has been put very well by one of the Australian bishops, who said:

There is only one Pastor of the Church and he is Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. All that priests do as pastors is serve Christ's own pastoring of the Church. There is only one priest in the Church, Jesus Christ, and all that Christian priests do is to be the sacramental presence of Christ's own priesthood. There is only one Teacher of the Church, Jesus Christ, and all that priests do is give voice to Jesus who speaks through them as the Word of life for their hearers.

As priests preside over the Church's liturgy and over the Christian community, they do so only as servants of Christ who alone is head of the Church (Bishop Michael Putney, Foreword in *The Prayer of the Priest*, 2005).

This is truly a wonderful vocation. We congratulate and thank Vince for accepting it, and we pledge him our support. I know that he will be a good shepherd among God's holy, consecrated, missioned people.