

The Homily preached by Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross, at the Ordination to Priesthood of Rev Ronan Sheehan at St. John the Baptist Church, Newcestown, Co Cork on Sunday September 18th, 2022.

‘You are called to lead people, not to yourself, but to God’

Today is a day of rejoicing for this parish of Murragh & Templemartin and for the Diocese of Cork & Ross as we gather in St John the Baptist Church, Newcestown, for the ordination of parishioner Ronan Sheehan. Ronan, you join a long line of priests and religious which this parish has offered the universal Church over the past 200 years; this long history was recently marked in the bicentenary of St Martin’s Church, Farnivane and this church’s 150th anniversary, celebrated this year.

Ronan, it is within this community that your priestly ordination was born, for vocations spring out of the local community and develop there. We give thanks for the gifts you received from this parish. It was within this community that your faith was born; here, your faith was nourished, under the guidance of your parents Bud and Denise, your

grandparents, your extended family and cousins, your teachers and educators, the priests who served here and the wider parish community.

Your call to priesthood only makes sense in the context of the wider community of the baptised faithful from which you were called. For there is only one priesthood, the priesthood of Christ. People share in this in two ways: through baptism and ordination. All share in the priesthood of Christ and from within the baptised, some are called to ministerial priesthood. As we are reminded by St Paul in the Second Reading: ‘There is one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ — each of us is called to respond in different ways, using our gifts and talents.

Ronan, today the Church entrusts to you the sacred ministry of priesthood. Through the laying on of hands you will



share in Christ's sacred ministry. You will be called to become more and more like Christ, the Priest, Teacher and Shepherd.

Through ordination you will receive from Jesus Christ the power of acting in His name. You will be configured to Christ. You will be enabled by Christ to be His minister, a dispenser of His gifts. Your power will come from Christ the Servant and day by day you must seek to ensure that He becomes a reality in your life, seen in the manner in which you serve.

Ronan, you are called to act in a unique way in the person of Christ in the Eucharist and the other sacraments. Acting in the person of Christ means that a priest can never put himself or his personal opinion at the centre of his ministry. He is called to lead people not to himself but to Christ.



The priest who offers sacrifice in the Mass must be one whose life is marked by sacrifice. Your ministry will be effective when you witness authentically to Jesus. It won't depend on your own efforts but on how you allow yourself to be an instrument of the life-giving power of Jesus.

Ronan, this can only happen through a

deep prayer life which you must continue to nourish, by spending time with the Word of God and the Prayer of the Church, cultivating your friendship with Jesus. Personal prayer is not something that can be separated from our pastoral activity. Prayer gives us what we can offer to others. People know a priest who is a man of prayer; they meet Christ through him and find a gospel wisdom in him.

This afternoon's gospel teaches us that Christ is The good shepherd. Ronan, as a priest you are called to be a good shepherd also. You will learn how, not by attending leadership seminars or being an expert in pastoral strategies — but by reflecting in your own life the good shepherd, Jesus Himself. Your words, your deeds, your life must show the face of Good Shepherd.

The priest is also called to be a teacher, to proclaim the Word of God in how he lives. The Rite of Ordination instructs the new priest to apply his energies 'to the duties of teaching in the name of Christ'. It calls on the priest to meditate on the law of God, and then insists:
*Believe what you read,
Teach what you believe and
Put into practice what you teach.*

Priesthood is a gift for the building up of the Church, not a personal privilege or a form of social recognition. The priest is never a freelance spiritual agent; he exercises his ministry in communion with all the priests.

The Rite of Ordination makes this visible when each priest here will lay his hands on the candidate and gathers around the bishop for the Prayer of Consecration. Eucharistic ministry is at the heart of priestly ministry. Eucharist generates communion. Priestly ministry must be exercised within communion. This is the deeper meaning of working together in ministry.

Ronan, today you join the presbyterate of the Diocese of Cork and Ross, a group of

men that the people of this Diocese are extremely proud of. I have come to know these priests over these last three years and I have grown in my appreciation of their richness and depth. Recently I have had conversations with over 80 of them. I have been humbled by the generosity, enthusiasm and openness with which they approached new appointments and shared conversations about the future mission of the church.

Ronan, you are being ordained a priest, at the moment that our diocese changes how faith communities are organised, as together we put out into deep water.

Pope Francis calls us to be a missionary Church, which reaches beyond itself to those on the margins, those who have disconnected, those hurt by our Church and so many of our young people! Our Church can never be turned in on itself but must always reach out. We must preach Christ's gospel, make disciples, baptise and preach, as true missionary disciples.

Ronan, your ordination take place in challenging and also exciting times, as we listen to the Holy Spirit calling us

to move towards a new way of being a church. We affirm the vocation of all the baptised, and appreciate more deeply the importance of the vocation of ordained priesthood within that priesthood of all baptised Christians. Earlier this month two young men embarked on the first stage of their preparation for priesthood, spending their first year in a college of initial formation in Valladolid, Spain. We need to affirm and encourage young men and women as they discern and listen to God's call to priesthood and religious life in the diocese of Cork and Ross.

Ronan, many will tell you that being a priest in today's culture will be difficult. This is indeed a time of great challenge — but it is for this very reason that it a great time to be a priest, a time rich with new possibilities. More than ever, society needs to hear the message of Jesus, proclaimed and lived authentically. May the Lord bless you and accompany you today and in your future ministry as you generously respond to the call you have received.

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