

The joy of priesthood: my first year

by Fr John Tabor

On 30th June 2018, Cardinal Vincent Nichols ordained me in Westminster Cathedral, along with five other men, for service as priests in this diocese. It was a moment of great solemnity and great joy. However, Cardinal Vincent noted it was but 'the end of the beginning'. Four years of formation at the Pontifical Bede College in Rome had given me essential training in philosophical, theological and pastoral studies, together with three very different but extremely worthwhile summer placements in the diocese. Now the real work started!

My first appointment has been the parish of Ss Peter and Paul, Northfields in West Ealing. When I was appointed I was asked to spend time working with the young families which make up a significant proportion of the parish. However, this was just a small part of the parish constituency. I soon discovered a hitherto unknown (at least to me) selection of loyal and hardworking groups, in particular the Knights of St Columba, the SVP and Legion of Mary. These graciously allowed me to share in their work and I have learned so much from their quiet, often unseen, but vital work in visiting the house bound, exemplary in its regular prayer life and their genuine love and care for the parish in countless practical ways. These have helped me to develop an understanding of the many and varied elements of parish life, amongst other things a thorough knowledge of financial systems and rather curiously perhaps, but very helpfully, an understanding of the mysteries of gutters and drainage systems! There is a real sense here of *ora et labora* (pray and work) which St Benedict would have approved of. In my parish priest, I have found one who has an innate feel for pastoral situations, with one of his first questions to me being: 'Do you have an oil stock?' and his generous application of the Sacraments to all who might need them, has been a great example.

Above all, I have been struck time and again this year by how much the People of God teach me about priesthood, by their way of living and especially by their prayer life and commitment to the sacraments. For those with young families, getting everyone (and everything) to Mass each Sunday is often not entirely straightforward, and yet they come. The generosity of parishioners here has been unstinting and that has been a source of affirmation.

Coming from a seminary community into the home of another has been challenging at times. The regularity of the seminary timetable, with fixed times for liturgy, lectures and meals, has been invaluable in helping me to acclimatise to this new way of living. The Liturgy of the Hours really does help to punctuate days in which literally anything and everything can happen. On one occasion, I found myself giving a First Blessing, customary in this first year of priesthood, to someone on his knees on the platform of a busy Underground station! It is a good life and the virtues of order, stability and balance are vital to my ongoing growth as a person and as a priest in the service of others. The celebration of Mass is an awesome privilege each day.

My own vocation story began when I was a boy at Downside and one of the highlights of this year was an invitation to celebrate Mass for the monastic community and school in the Abbey church, very appropriately, on Good Shepherd Sunday. As I said in my homily: 'These past months have been far better, far more real than I could have ever hoped. It is a privilege to share the sacraments with

so many, and accompany them, in particularly during Confession and administering the Anointing of the Sick.'

To anyone who might be discerning a vocation I would say, be generous, because God is never outdone in generosity. Have the courage to be yourself and listen with the ear of your heart to what God might be saying to you today and every day. God has a wonderful plan for each of us, to become the person he knows we can be.