

22nd August 2022

Ordination

"Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum."

"All things work together for good to those who love God."

Bible, *Romans 8:28*

David Leon Toups is an American priest in the Roman Catholic Church who hails from Seattle, Washington, and who is now Bishop of the Diocese of Beaumont in Texas. In an interview with Annamarie Adkins for "Catholic Online" in 2008, Father Toups said this about ordination to the priesthood:

The character that the priest receives is a comfort to the faithful inasmuch as they realize their faith is not based in the personality of the priest, but rather the Person of Christ working through the priest. On the other hand, the priest is called, like all of the faithful, to a life of holiness. The character received at ordination is actually a dynamism for priestly holiness. The more he can assimilate his life to Christ and submit to the gift he received at ordination, the more he will be a credible witness to the faithful and edify the Body of Christ.

As someone who has been ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church for close to fifty years, I can understand Bishop Toups' critique of ordination. It isn't about the distinctiveness of our personality, but that, through our human gifts, the faithful can be directed to higher things. We are called to a life of holiness, and while each of us will be aware of our flaws, we do what we can to be "a credible witness".

But I'm increasingly uncomfortable with the assumption that "the Person of Christ working through the priest" and "a dynamism for priestly holiness" is limited to the exclusive group the Church "sets apart" in ordination. Are we not *all* priests? Ministry is for everyone who is obedient to the Call of Christ. When a commitment is made and an individual is confirmed in their faith, is there not an obligation that "the person of Christ" works through that life, and is that life not also called to "a dynamism of priestly holiness"? *All* are worthy of the label of "ordination".

Toups chose as his episcopal motto the quote above from St Paul's Letter to the Romans. It's based, he tells us, on his predecessor's motto and his mother's favourite quote: "For those who love God, all things work together for good." Might that not be a significant pointer to the ministry of all believers, and open the concept of ordination to everyone?

A prayer for today

Lord, you call me, as I am, ready to be even better in your service. Amen