**Feast of Saint Laurence O’Toole**

**DUBLIN DIOCESAN ORDINATIONS 2017**

Homily notes of Most **Rev. Diarmuid Martin** Archbishop of Dublin

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11.00am St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral, 14th November 2017

**Introduction**

“We gather as a diocesan community on this Feast of Saint Laurence O’Toole, Principal Patron of the Diocese, for this joyful occasion when we will see two deacons, Bill O’Shaughnessy and James Daly, raised to the priesthood for service in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

I greet the Members of the Metropolitan Chapter, the Auxiliary Bishops, the priests and deacons, lay pastoral workers and seminarians and especially a number of Priests who this year celebrate important priestly jubilees, as well as the families and friends of the two deacons.

I chose this Feast of Saint Laurence O’Toole as the day to celebrate the ordinations not just because he is the Patron of the diocese.  Laurence O’Toole was born in [1128](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1128_in_Ireland) – in Castledermot from where Bill O’Shaughnessy hails – and I believe that the life of this twelfth century priest and bishop in many ways can serve as a model of priestly ministry for our twenty-first century times.

We thank God for the gift of priestly ministry.  We recognise our own weakness and our need of forgiveness and ask for the strength of God’s mercy to accompany us on our life’s journey

**Homily**

The opening prayer of our Mass succinctly reminded us of the characteristics of the priestly ministry Saint Laurence O’Toole.  He was a man of deep prayer and holiness, fostered initially through his life of solitude and quiet as monk and Abbot of Glendalough.  He was called to be Archbishop of Dublin at a crucial moment in history of Dublin and of Ireland to reflect the holiness of God.   He was a teacher of the clergy, who set in motion a renewal of clerical life and theological formation.  He brought Augustinian Canons to make his Cathedral more firmly a place of prayer and to recall his clergy to the central place of prayer in their lives.

Laurence became a true shepherd of his people.  He is described particularly as a friend of the poor.  His residence became a place where the poor were certain to find welcome and food at a time of great distress for the many who experienced dismal poverty.  He was also a man of perseverance, a man who went to every possible extent to bring peace to Dublin and to the country, showing the crucial role that a man of faith can play in the realities of political and social life.

Laurence was a learned man who knew the monastic and ecclesiastical traditions of the Europe of his time.  He attended the Third Lateran Council, the eleventh [ecumenical council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecumenical_council) of the Church, in March 1179 meeting with over 300 bishops attending.

A year later, he was back in mainland Europe on a mission to encounter the Norman King in an effort to bring peace.  He died in the French town of Eu and his presence there for just a few days created such an effect that it was the people of that town who proposed him for canonisation.  He was canonised by Pope Honorius III in 1225, just 45 years after his death.

Pope Honorius himself was a reformer Pope.  He is remembered especially for his efforts to see the charisms of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic more firmly established in the life of the Church.  He approved the [Dominican Order](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominican_Order) in 1216 and the [Franciscan Order](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franciscan_Order) in 1223.

It is fascinating to reflect that Pope Honorius probably looked on Laurence O’Toole as a kind of kindred soul to Francis and Dominic as someone who shared their passion for the radical renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Dear Bill and James.  Firstly may I thank you for the way in which you have prepared for this day and for the challenging life that opens out for you today.  They have been long years but you never lost your own passion to be priests.  The clergy and the people of this diocese welcome you and I know they will accompany your ministry with their prayers.  Once again, I thank your families for the way in which they nurtured your Christian faith over the years and also those who were responsible for your formation.

Prayer and solitude, true pastoral care for the people entrusted to you, being friend of the poor: these are characteristics of Saint Laurence O’Toole which should be part of the inspiration and motivation of the ministry to which the Church calls you today.

The fundamental law of Christianity is the law of love.  The Gospel reading reminds us of the call of Peter by Jesus to be shepherd of his flock.  The questioning of Jesus is not a theological examination or an evaluation of their social or political views, but a repeated questioning about Peter’s love.  Jesus knew the fragility of Peter’s love and loyalty, but even though imperfect, that love was to be the strength of his calling and mission. Peter was upset at being asked three times.  Bill and James:  your ministry of witnessing to the love of Jesus will inevitably at times upset your human sensitivity, comfort, and security.  Never allow human upset to impede your love of Jesus.

The great commandment of love is rooted in the very nature of God. In a recent article, the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams reflected on the early Church’s teaching of a God who is Lord because he is “free to exercise his essential being which is love wherever he wills”.  We Christians are called then to learn to love beyond the boundaries of common interest and human sympathy.  Christian love is a love that is not inspired by any reciprocal benefit that may emerge.

The early Christian martyrs witnessed to this concept of love in their daily life.  They could live in any regime but they could never grant any State or a regime absolute allegiance.  The unhesitating generosity of God could never restrict the believer to being unquestionably loyal just to a regime or in some way to treat Caesar as God.

Christian love today involves a similar absolute allegiance to God over the many compromising allegiances within which lives can become trapped: whether they are allegiances to consumerism, or to human success or popularity or to wealth and power.  Your commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience is not an allegiance of restriction, but an allegiance to be free to love as God loves and will only be authentic is founded in love.

The Church can never be the closed community of the like-minded.  It can never be simply a comfort zone.  The Church must be a dynamic community that can live in any specific culture, but is always marked by a Gospel freedom that allows us as believers to discern values that endure, even if they are not fashionable or popular.

These last fifty years have seen great changes in Irish culture and in the place of the Church in society.  Fifty years ago, the Catholic Church in Ireland played a dominant and at times domineering role in so many aspects of Irish society.

Where then Bill and James must you root the foundations of your following the law of God’s love in a changing Ireland?   It is the same question that I must ask of myself and each of us must ask as priests, religious or lay Christians.   We have to rediscover a faith that integrates our lives as Laurence O’Toole did.  We need a faith where theology and prayer, witness and care of the poor belong together and can influence the world around us and make society more loving.

Our faith must influence the society around us.  But that influence on society will be sterile without faith.  I quote again from Archbishop Rowan Williams: “we should not be surprised if we become hazy about our doctrine… when we are less clear about our priorities as a community, or if we become less passionate about service, forgiveness and peace when we have stopped thinking clearly about God”.

Faith involves a different way of living within any culture.  What is involved is not a negative reaction or simple rejection of a changing world.  What is involved is forming a believing community that sees beyond superficial confines and recognizes God’s presence and purpose in all persons and things.

The Christian life is not easy.  Belief in Jesus Christ, however, opens the way to new freedom.  The Christian life is not about blindly following a pre-established rulebook or imposing rules on others. It involves attaining the freedom to renounce prosperity and security for ourselves in order to live for others as Jesus did and then finding joy and fulfilment in living the Gospel.

Bill and James you are called in a special way to minister to God’s people through the celebration of the Eucharist, the celebration of the sacrificial love of Christ for his people and the spiritual nourishment of a life of Christian love.  You cannot celebrate that mystery of God’s love without embodying in your own lives a ceaseless love for Jesus.  Our prayer this morning at this landmark moment in your lives is that God, who has begun the good work in you, may day by day bring it to fulfilment. **ENDS**