

## Homily on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Ordination of Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD

by Bishop John Michael Sherlock

### Introductory Welcome:

My sisters and brothers in Christ. I begin by welcoming all of you to this joyful celebration of Sunday Mass, during which Fr. Dominic will be celebrating his 25th Anniversary and giving thanks to God for his vocation to the priesthood. I invite all of you to join in prayer for him. I welcome all the visitors who have already been welcomed by our commentator.

I want to welcome the parishioners here at St. Andrews - a special welcome to you.

Fr. Dominic has managed to extend the Carmelite Family beyond the confines of the London Diocese, as I announced earlier, there are many members of the Secular Order here, and we welcome them as well.

As we begin our celebration let us do so in the spirit of great thanksgiving to God, but conscious of our sinfulness.

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My dear sisters and brothers in Christ. First of all I want to recognize the presence of the hearing impaired with us today, and I welcome them and thank them for coming to this Celebration. I also recognize Mr. O'Brien, the Federal Member of Parliament and I welcome him. And a very special welcome once more to all of you.

Earlier this week, well, I don't know if it was earlier this week, but recently I sent to Fr. Dominic a Greeting of the Holy Father and a Special Blessing to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of his Ordination. I am not sure where Fr. Dominic got that beautiful vestment, but it certainly looks like a Jubilee Garment wouldn't you say?

When we come to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Ordination of a priest, it is very important for us to remember first of all that a vocation to the priesthood is a gift from God, but it is not primarily a gift to the individual who receives it. It is a gift to the Church, and it is for the welfare of the Church. The very centre of our Church is the Altar, and the Holy Eucharist which is celebrated there. It is in the Holy Eucharist that Jesus makes present amongst us constantly the mystery of our redemption - the Paschal Mystery of His death and resurrection. It becomes present here and it causes the Church to be born again and again. That is why the Fathers of the Church said "what the Church makes, makes the Church" - The Church through the Ministry of priests, makes the Eucharist, but the Eucharist makes the Church. You are one body so eat of one bread. You are the body of Christ, member for member, and it is through the Eucharistic Body that the living organism of the Church is reborn, is daily in the works, so imagine how desperate we would be without priests. When God gives the gift of priesthood to the Church, there is one necessary step without which God's plan will be frustrated, and that is that the one who is called must respond.

First the one who is called must discern that the call is authentic. There are many people who wonder if they are being called, and so it is important that a person pray and discern, and that he use help in order to discern whether or not the call is truly real. That is why we have in the Church a process of discernment in order to determine that someone is truly called to the priesthood, and then, by the call of the Bishop, the official call of the Church, someone is summoned to Ordination. But at the root of it all, must be the willingness to say yes. We are in a world where we are short of priests - Shorter than we have been in a long time, and one cannot believe that it is because God is not calling. There is a danger that some are not responding - for a variety of reasons. The point is that when we come together to celebrate the anniversary of an ordination, we are thanking God for this gift of priesthood to the Church, and we are thanking the priest, in this case Fr. Dominic, for having said YES 25 years ago to the summons of the Church.

Now let me turn for a moment to address another aspect of the priestly ministry which is closely

connected with the Eucharist, and that is the duty of proclaiming the word of God. It the prophetic responsibility of a priest to speak in God's name ... to proclaim the truth that God has revealed for the salvation of the world. All of the readings of today's Mass tell us about that responsibility. So the first duty of one who is going to be a prophet is to listen to the Word of God, and secondly it is to respond to the command to go out and preach the Gospel to all the nations. Go into the whole world ... preach the good news to all the nations.

So these are the three steps - hearing - going - preaching. Fr. Dominic, in his life as a priest has carefully, carefully, studied the Word of God. He has relished it. He has buried himself in it. He has responded to it by leaving his family, his homeland, to go wherever he felt the call of God summoning him, and he has preached the Word of God with authenticity, with power and with fervour All of that is implied in the first reading of today's Mass.

The second reading from St. Paul reminds us of something else 'there can be no authentic ministry without a profound life of prayer', and Paul has just finished before the reading we heard today, communicating to people the extraordinary revelation he has had in prayer. Considering the exceptional character of the revelation, Paul was immersed in the mystery he had been caught up in - into the seventh heaven - he had visions of eternity, of the transcendence of God, that he was unable to put into words - and he might easily have become proud. So God allows him a thorn in the flesh, a stumbling block to remind him of his humanity, of his weakness, of his need of prayer, of his need of utter dependence upon God in order to remind him that he was nothing but an earthen vessel containing this great mystery, this great gift of God. If every priest has that experience of having the exaltation of nearness of God and the terrible frustration of his own humanity limiting him, giving him a deep awareness of his own weakness and of his need of grace, then this is why the Church urges us time and time again to pray for our priests. Pray for their fidelity. Pray for their consolations.

One of the things that happens to prophets is exactly what happened to Jesus in Nazareth - it happens to parish priests - it happens in families - suddenly someone has some special gift and people say "who is he?" "who is he telling us ... I mean, he is only one of us ... and we know his parents .. he's a nobody the same of the rest of us". Here is Jesus, in his own home town, and encountering this familiarity that breeds contempt, an unwillingness on the part of people to listen ... and a fundamental rejection of him as a result, the lack of faith that he encountered, frustrated him. St. Mark says bluntly he could do no deeds of power there. If God does not encounter faith, God cannot overcome human freedom in order to do the things for us he longs to do. Every priest in our world has encountered the frustration of unbelief, of hearing the Gospel rejected, having people believe that they have a wisdom greater than that of Christ. The wisdom of the crowd - the power of crucifixion is madness to the modern world, insanity to the academic, and if that is the Gospel, the only Gospel we preach, it is the Gospel of Salvation. It is the Gospel, which so often, is not heard or is rejected. And so, like all prophets, priests have the problem of discouragement, the problems of being rejected. It is then most of all that they need to be conscious that they act in the name of God, they go in the name of God, and they have no reason to do anything but to spread the Good Word despite the unreceptivity of so many who hear it. Preach in season, or out of season, whether welcome or unwelcomed insist on it, St. Paul tells Titus and Timothy.

Fr. Dominic has also faced rejection, and all of these realities that are part of being a true prophet. I wanted simply to share all that with you in order to remind you how heavy a burden the Church lays on the shoulders of its priests. How heavy a responsibility it is to speak in the name of God - how difficult it is to live worthily of the Word one preaches. How one is beset by weakness - how desperately priests need our prayers - how they need our support - how they need the consolation of a community of believers.

Throughout his life as a priest, Fr. Dominic has had his Carmelite congregation, his Carmelite Order as support, as a family, as a strength in order to sustain him in all his moments of difficulty. And so it was in the Old Testament, that prophets like Elijah and Elisha, they had companies of prophets who followed them as disciples, who worked with them as a source of strength, as well as sometimes as a pain in the neck. The other thing about community life, which is the same as family life. Family life is a blessing, and it is a cross. It is the way God makes married people whole. It is a cross of self-denial, out of love for others, and so it is with community life where people are a burden to one another. Human beings are both

a blessing and a burden. You can't live without them, and you can't live with them, and all of these are ways in which God purifies us and helps us to carry out the prophetic mission with greater authenticity, and with greater integrity. So as we celebrate this anniversary, remember who it is we thank - Almighty God for the gift of priests, the Church for having discerned in Father Dominic the authenticity of his vocation, Fr. Dominic for having responded - his Carmelite Community for having supported him - this parish for giving him an opportunity to be a true shepherd. And I personally give thanks to Fr. Dominic for having led the Carmelite Community here to Canada in the Diocese of London. Fr. Dominic and I are old friends. I can't believe that he spent half of his life - he's fifty years old, - he spent half his life as a priest - and I was ordained the day Dominic was three years old. So I'm looking forward to either a quick funeral or a Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration.

God Bless you all.