

Address of Bishop Michael Router  
at his Episcopal Ordination  
Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh  
21 July 2019

Good afternoon everyone. May I begin by welcoming and thanking our special guests for their attendance here today especially the Bishops who came from all over Ireland, the clergy from the Archdiocese of Armagh, and from the Diocese of Kilmore and from other diocese along with my classmates from Maynooth College, and the members of Religious Orders and Organisations. A very special thanks to Most Rev. Dr. Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh, representing the Church of Ireland, Rev. Louise Donald, representing the Methodist Church, to Mrs. Mealla Campbell, The Lord Mayor of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council, Mr. Paul Bell, The Mayor of Louth County Council, Mr. Shane P. O'Reilly Chairman of Cavan Co. Council, Liam Hannaway, The Chief Executive of the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Cathal Boylan MLA, Colm Gildernew MLA, Ms. Niamh Smyth TD, Senator Joe O'Reilly, local Councillors and representatives of the P.S.N.I., An Garda Síochána and the GAA.

Thank you to everyone else for being here on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of July when there are so many other alternatives available to you particularly if you are interested in sport. Of course, the people of Armagh, Louth, Derry and Cavan have not much more than a neutral interest in the super eights which are happening as I speak. Congratulations to the Tyrone people among us who do. In Cavan we thought we might have an interest in the later stages, but Tyrone saw to that as they inevitably do! There is always next year, but in Cavan we have been saying that for the past 22 years now.

I think you will agree that it was a beautiful ceremony today. So many people were involved in its preparation and execution that it would be impossible to mention them all, but the committee led by chairperson Deacon Paul Mallon and secretary Clar Doherty took on the brunt of the workload. Clar Doherty's husband Cathal hasn't forgiven me for the clash with Donegal and Kerry this afternoon so I better thank him as well. Behind every great woman is a patient man. When thanking Deacon Paul and Clar I would also like to include all the staff in Ara Coeli and in the Cathedral Parish for their help and support preparing for this day. The organising committee included Fr. Peter McAnely, Administrator, and Fr. Thomas McHugh, curate, in the Cathedral parish here in Armagh who were incredibly competent in the organisation of today's wonderful liturgy and were superbly assisted by Fr. Aidan McCann, Fr. Barry Matthews, seminarians Stephen Wilson and Colm O'Hagan, the seminarians from the Redemptoris Mater Seminary, Dundalk, sacristans Roger Duggan and Denis Halligan and the parish altar servers and their coordinator Noreen Evans. The music and singing were beautiful and for that we must complement Colm Murphy and the wonderful Cathedral Choir. They worked hard to prepare for today and indeed gave up part of their summer break to be involved. Thank you to Dermot Kelly, The Diocesan Youth Commission and the young people from around the Archdiocese who were involved today in the procession and the sprinkling rite – it was great to have them taking part. Please God they will continue to contribute much to the future of the Church here in Armagh.

Thank you also to John McVey, the Diocesan Financial Administrator, Pearce Dynes and all the stewards and car park attendants, to Maura Kelly, Chairperson and the Armagh Parish Pastoral Council, the Knights of St. Columbanus, the Staff of the O'Fiaich Library, Dominic Clarke, Principal of St. Patrick's College, and the College Staff, for their crucial contribution to the smooth running of this event and to the Corrin Pipe Band for providing entertainment outside the Cathedral.

It is truly an honour for me today to join the clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Armagh, the primatial see of Ireland founded by our patron, Saint Patrick. His successor, Archbishop Eamon Martin, has been most welcoming and helpful to me since my appointment was announced last May. Archbishop Eamon I thank you for your thought provoking and challenging sermon today and for all your kindness and hospitality. I look forward to assisting you in whatever way I can in the years ahead.



I want to thank Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo for his presence here today and for being a co-consecrator at this ceremony. His prayers, gentle reassurance and his guidance have been most helpful to me over the past few months.

Thank you also to Bishop Leo O'Reilly, Bishop Emeritus of my native diocese of Kilmore, who has been a tremendous example and inspiration to me over the past 22 years. He is enjoying a well-deserved retirement since last January, but I know that his wisdom, guidance, and encouragement will continue to be available to me and to many others in the years ahead. Kilmore is fortunate to have during the interregnum, a very able administrator in Monsignor Liam Kelly and I wish to thank him for all his encouragement and support as well.

Thank you to Cardinal Seán for his presence here today and for his help and advice over the past few weeks. We can console each other when some of the local tribes beat our native county on the football field.

The most supportive and loving people in my life are, of course, my parents Tony and Nora and my sisters Breda and Martina, my brothers in law, Derek and Ollie, my nieces and nephews and all my family circle. I know I am blessed by God to have my parents here with me today I thank them for all they have contributed to my life thus far. Especially for their witness to fidelity and love over 57 years of married life together and the support they have given me during my 30 years of priestly ministry.

For me the preparation for today began when my parents brought me to be baptised in Mary Immaculate Church in Virginia in April 1965. The grace of that sacrament stays with us all our lives and it anoints us for our God-given vocation in life. Each one of us has a vocation. Each one is here for a purpose. For me personally that was a calling to the priesthood and that vocation has been nourished and strengthened through childhood and into adulthood by the influence and example of lay people, clergy and religious, particularly in my home town of Virginia who were always a hugely positive influence for me.

I am a child of the 1960s born just as the Second Vatican Council was coming to an end. The Ireland of the '60s, '70s and '80s, though often criticised in popular comment, was actually, in my experience, a great time and place to be a young person. I am thankful to have grown up in those years and in many ways to have grown up in a more open society and in a more open church shaped by the council.

The welcome that I have experienced in every faith community where I have ever lived or worked in Kilmore, and which I have received here in Armagh, over the past two months has left me with a very strong appreciation of the goodness and faith of so many people. Members of the Church, both lay and clerical, have given hope, courage and strength to so many down through the years and provided a sense of identity, pride and community for millions of Irish people at home and abroad.

I am, however, sharply aware that some people do not share the same positive experience of Church that I have. The institutional Church in this country, from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century did not adequately challenge the social divide that existed in society. Despite the pioneering work of many Church personnel in the fields of education and healthcare, it did not adequately defend, in the way it should have done, the rights of the poor and vulnerable. The Irish Church's mistakes and failures have caused deep hurt and pain to many people and we must remember and acknowledge that, while we celebrate here today, many people have turned their backs to us and walked away.

There is much that we have relied upon as a Church in the past that will simply not be there in the future. The Canadian Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor in his essay 'A Catholic Modernity?' reflects on how modern secularism's process of 'dethroning' Catholicism throughout the western world, of gradually disentangling the Church from the dominant institutions of societies where it long held political and social power, has paradoxically liberated it to find a new and creative voice in the present. The fact that the Church



has been stripped of its former power and prestige is not a negative thing. The Church will be smaller and humbler in the future but those who are involved, who practice regularly, who volunteer their time, energy and resources to support the mission will not be doing it for any social or economic advantage but because they want to; because they see that life has no meaning without Jesus Christ at its centre. The quest for meaning, such a central issue in the modern world, will always bring people back to the faith

I think today of the many lay people who ministered with me in the parishes I have worked in over the past 30 years and particularly in Bailieborough and the wider parish of Killann over the past five years. It must be said that as a Church we rely heavily on the cooperation, support and help of women to achieve anything worthwhile. Their contribution needs further enhancement and development if we are to flourish in the future. As Pope Francis outlines in his recent Exhortation *Christus Vivit* “a Church that is overly fearful and tied to its structures can be invariably critical of efforts to defend the rights of women, and constantly point out the risks and the potential errors of those demands. Instead, a living Church can react by being attentive to the legitimate claims of those women who seek greater justice and equality”.

The future will also necessitate greater education and formation of committed lay people to provide leadership at a liturgical, spiritual and administrative level and at the level of evangelisation and out-reach. I see that very much in operation here in this Archdiocese in the opportunities available for Adult Faith Formation and in the ongoing planning for the future in parishes and pastoral areas that is advanced and productive. Developing and working with small groups of people, Basic Christian Communities, to provide support for the committed Christian in a hostile world and support for ourselves in our ministry, will be essential.

Now is the time for us, people and clergy together, to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in order to shape a Church fit for purpose in the 21st century and to continue to bring ourselves and our communities into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ who will take on all our burdens and our anxieties if we trust in him. To know Jesus in prayer and in the reading of scripture is to allow him to change us from the inside out. That is our task as ministers of his sacraments and of his word; not to place burdens upon people's shoulders but to give them hope. None of us are perfect all of us are sinners but we won't change or strive to be better unless we first encounter the real Jesus and let him touch our hearts.

Finally, I am heartened by the words from today's second reading from The Letter to the Hebrews – “Every high priest...lives in the limitation of weakness”. Even though I am very conscious of my own weakness and limitations I abandon myself to God's will and I call on the power of his Holy Spirit to guide and inspire me in the years ahead. That is why I have chosen as my motto “In Manus Tuas Domine” – “Into your hands, O Lord”. I know that the Lord's help, support and encouragement will come through all of you here present and through the people and priests of this great Archdiocese who I have been called to learn from and work with in the future. Remember me in your prayers as I will remember you in mine.

St. Patrick, pray for us, St. Brigid, pray for us, Saint Benan, pray for us, St Malachy, pray for us, St. Oliver Plunkett, pray for us.