

BISHOP MARK O'TOOLE – WORDS AT END OF ORDINATION

[Following the address of the Apostolic Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Antonio Mennini]

Thank you, your Excellency, for your kind words, for being here today, and for your goodness to me over these months. Through you, I express my fidelity to His Holiness, Pope Francis, the successor of St Peter. I pray that I be given the grace to mirror something of Pope Francis' open heart in shepherding this beautiful Diocese of Plymouth.

There is much that fills my heart today. Overwhelmingly, there is a sense of immense gratitude to God for his faithfulness. I know that I am a sinner, yet I experience the love and mercy of Jesus in this deeper call to service in His Church

I thank The Lord Lieutenant of Devon, Sir Eric Dancer, for being here to represent Her Majesty the Queen, and I am pleased, too, that The Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall, Colonel Edward Bolitho is here. I am very happy to greet for the first time The Lord Mayor of Plymouth and to thank the other civic leaders and guests who are present. I thank God for the co-operation that we have, working with all people of faith and with those of good will who do not believe in God, in service especially of those most in need. I am delighted, too, that leaders from the other Christian communities are here. Our common witness to the Gospel is so important for our society and I look forward to getting to know you and to working with you.

I pray that I be a worthy successor to Bishop Christopher. We all thank you, Bishop Christopher, for your whole-hearted dedication to the diocese over the past twenty-eight years. We pray for God's blessing on this next stage of your ministry.

Especially on this first occasion of speaking as your bishop in this Cathedral I warmly greet the family of the Diocese: laymen and women, religious, seminarians, deacons, and priests. Thank you for the kind and hospitable welcome that you have already shown me. To all the priests of the diocese, I want to say how much I look forward to meeting you personally and getting to know you; know that you always have my support. The fact that I am your bishop will not prevent us, I hope, from being brothers. I know I will need that, particularly as I make my home among you. Thank you for the gift of this beautiful crozier, this pastoral staff. It is a reminder to us that at the heart of our vocation is the service of God's people. That means, as Pope Francis has reminded us, that we have "the smell of the sheep".

It is a great joy to have our diocesan seminarians with us. You are a sign of hope and of the generosity of our young people. I am convinced that there are many more, who with the right encouragement, can be helped to make life commitments in the Church whether that be to marriage, religious life, the permanent diaconate, or the priesthood. Let us all continue to pray and work in promoting these vocations.

In our Catholic understanding a bishop is sent to a diocese. I am aware that I come to you as someone who, like Solomon, feels he does not know how to go out or come in. I definitely do not know the road to Penzance or to Poole! I have been asked to step out into something new. This new call that I experience in my life is a reminder of the kind of stepping out that we, as the whole Church, need to do in order that Jesus be better known and loved.

From the age of 17, Jesus has exerted an attraction over my heart; no other can match the magnetic pull of His love, or the peace that His friendship brings. We believe that each person is made for such experience, for each of us is a beloved child of the Father, and called to be with Him forever. We put our belief in Jesus, and our love of Him, at the service of those most in need in our society: the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, those who feel alienated from God.

We need to reach out to those who have turned away from the practice of the faith, many of whom are in our own families and parish communities. How can we walk with them in a way that will help them to see once more the beauty of following Jesus? Especially, we are called to step out from the doors of the Church to those who do not know God or who have never known the power of Jesus' love. There are many in our society who search for truth, beauty and goodness, who need to know the touch of God's mercy and the love of Jesus.

This is our mission, and its task, Jesus entrusts to us all. I know that there is much that I need to become familiar with in the diocese, many to listen to, and a lot to learn. There is much I do not know. But one thing I do know. From all eternity, in the boundless mystery of His merciful love, God has destined Mark O'Toole to be Bishop of Plymouth. He has prepared me for you, and He has prepared you for me. So let us begin to walk together.

And as we begin this path we seek the loving intercession of Our Blessed Lady and our diocesan patrons.

Our Lady, star of the sea... (Pray for us)

St Boniface... (Pray for us)

St Cuthbert Mayne... (Pray for us)

Thank you and God bless you all.