



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ENGLAND & WALES

## Episcopal Ordination of Fr Robert Byrne C.O. *Archbishop Bernard Longley*

VIGIL, BIRMINGHAM ORATORY, BIRMINGHAM, 12 MAY 2014

***Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you.***

**This evening offers us a wonderful opportunity to unite ourselves with Fr Robert in prayerful preparation for his Episcopal Ordination in St Chad's Cathedral tomorrow. I am delighted that we do so here at the Birmingham Oratory, the community and parish that nurtured Fr Robert's vocation in its earliest days and where he first made himself at home in the Archdiocese of Birmingham.**

Even more significant are the intrinsic and multi-faceted associations between this place and Blessed John Henry Newman, whose beatification by Pope Benedict in 2010 has brought so many blessings to our local Church. I have said to Fr Robert that we must now count his episcopal ministry among us as one of the gifts we have received through the intercession of Blessed John Henry, Cardinal Newman.

It is also fitting tonight that we are united in prayer, before the Blessed Sacrament, with the Oratory Fathers from Birmingham and Oxford, where Fr Robert served for many years as Provost, as well as from Manchester, London and York. We see in tomorrow's ordination a deepening appreciation for the charism of the Oratory as members of its various English houses increasingly play their part in the life of the Church at diocesan and national levels.

With this in mind I thank the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory, Fr Ignatius, for inviting us here for this significant moment of prayer. I am grateful to him and the Oratory Fathers for the deepening spiritual kinship that this establishes between us and for the welcome presence of the Delegate of the Holy See and Visitor of the Oratory, Fr Felix Selden.

This Vigil of Prayer allows us to unite ourselves with all those who will surround Fr Robert tomorrow during the Mass of Ordination. Chief among them will be Fr Robert's parents and his uncle, Fr John Rigby from the Diocese of Salford. It is a particular pleasure to welcome you and the other members of Fr Robert's family together with so many friends to our own diocesan family.

As Fr Robert prays for the strength and guidance of the Holy spirit in preparation for tomorrow he has no doubt taken to heart the sound pastoral advice offered in the First Letter of St Peter: I have something to tell your elders: I am an elder myself, and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and with you I have a share in the glory that is to be revealed.

Whenever St Peter remembered the sufferings of Christ he must surely have recalled his own bitter experience of having denied our Lord, on the night before He died, waiting beside the charcoal fire in the courtyard of Caiaphas the high priest. He realised that despite this the Lord never withdrew His choice of Peter as the rock on which He would build His church.

Whenever we are faced with any great task placed before us by our loving Master – and especially in preparation for an apostolic ministry - we can seek to be strengthened by the example and experience of St Peter himself. There is nothing that can overwhelm us when we called and equipped by Christ the Good Shepherd. That is the message that St Peter entrusts to us as he says: Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to your care.

It is also the powerful inspiration we draw from tonight's Gospel, where St Peter's threefold denial is no more than a foreshadowing of his threefold expression of love for the risen Christ and his irrevocable commissioning by our Lord: Feed my lambs...look after my sheep.

In these days following Good Shepherd Sunday and on the Eve of the Memoria of Our Lady of Fatima I thank our Lord for the new ministry He is now entrusting to us and for the fresh allegiance and dedication to Christa and to His Church which Fr Robert is about to make in his Profession of Faith.

Last summer I went for the first time on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our lady at Fatima and among my intentions there was a prayer that we might soon be blessed with a new Auxiliary Bishop. Tomorrow's date was Fr Robert's choosing, not mine, but it cannot fail to prompt me and all of us to give our thanks to God for the loving patronage of Our Lady of Fatima.

In this shrine of his, and in the house which he founded, we also ask for the prayers of Blessed John Henry Newman and of St Philip Neri that Fr Robert, who has shared with them the life and ministry of the Oratory Fathers, may now approach his new apostolate with all the joy that born of our confidence in Christ alone.

**Most Rev Bernard Longley**

*Archbishop of Birmingham*