

Episcopal Ordination of Bishop-elect David Oakley

19th March 2020

As we enter this Rite of Ordination there are two great figures keeping us company: David and Joseph. They can guide us, step by step.

David, the great King, the charismatic leader, who danced before the Ark of the Covenant, who sinned greatly and loved the Lord his God even more greatly; David who performed sacrificial offerings and proclaimed the Word of the Lord (2 Samuel 6:13-17), the earliest role of the high priest.

Joseph, who listened to the word of God, whispered to him, in his sleep, who obeyed, who was faithful, steadfast, full of integrity and noble in his care of his God-given family.

In the first reading, we hear the promise of God to David that his son, Samuel, is the one 'who shall build a house for my name' (2 Samuel 7:13), fulfilled in the great Temple of Jerusalem with its life of prayer, sacrifice and service: its priesthood. Yet this promise finds a far greater fulfilment through Joseph. He is the one who names Jesus (Matthew 1:25), thereby incorporating Jesus into the House of David, the House of Joseph himself. Yes, Jesus receives his flesh from Mary and his history from Joseph. So we see the promise made to David fulfilled in a marvellous manner, for it is indeed the son of David who today continues to build a living Temple for God, us, the Body of Christ, His Church, His vital presence in the

world today. In Jesus, these promises, and the priesthood they include, are fulfilled.

From the earliest times, as recorded in the Book of Exodus, the nature of the priest is clearly shown. He is presented as one who, turning away from every idolatry, is chosen by God, consecrated by God, for the service of God. The great priestly functions were to be 'guardians of the Ark', to offer the Temple sacrifices, to teach and lead the people. And this is still our priestly calling today.

But it is radically deepened by the life and death of Jesus. His sacrifice, which replaces all others in the great economy of salvation, is a sacrifice of liberty: given freely and given for our freedom. It is the sacrifice of a servant, not the action of a priest. He is the Lamb of God and in his self-offering puts an end to the priestly sacrifices of lambs, goats and bulls. Indeed, the priesthood of Jesus is not a function, nor an inheritance, but it is rooted in his very being. His sacrifice is who he is. In this sense, he is our great high priest, not in his functioning, but in his very nature. He is, in a technical word, ontologically our great high priest who gives us the boldness to come to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

The prayer of the consecration of this David, as your new bishop, takes its shape from some of these themes. We recall that God 'did not leave your sanctuary without ministers to serve you'. We pray for the 'governing spirit' to be given to David. We ask that he will be 'a high priest blameless in your

sight' gaining 'the blessing of your favour, and offering the gifts of your holy Church'. He will be the one 'to assign ministries as you have decreed', in other words to choose and consecrate those who, in times to come, will serve God and His people as priests of this Diocese. With their bishop, they will be the 'keepers of the mysteries of God' (1 Corinthians 4:1) and 'ministers of the new Covenant' (2 Corinthians 3:6). In their being and in their lives, they will bring to a fresh reality the promise first made to David, the King, now fulfilled through David, the bishop. He will receive the powerful symbolic gifts of ring, mitre, and crozier and very shortly take his seat in this Cathedra, from where he will teach and guide, building up this living Temple of the Lord. And in all these tasks he will be guided by Joseph and imitate him in the loving care of this family of the Lord.

As today you gain a new father in faith, so too, if I may say, in this family of faith you gain a new grandfather. Dear Bishop Peter, I know I speak for everyone in this Cathedral, and for so, so many who are not here. We thank you for the loving care with which you have guided and nurtured this family, this Diocese. We are so grateful for the burdens you have borne and the love you have given, to the Lord and to us all. And we know that in order to be vibrant signs of hope we should often, in the words of Pope Francis, go and talk to our grandparents! Peter, may God bless the years ahead of you and be sure of our prayers just as we ask for your prayers for us, and especially for your successor to whom you will shortly hand over your pastoral staff with all its rich symbolism.

Now, we must proceed. David, please be ready to take the solemn promises made by every bishop at his episcopal ordination, and my fellow bishops, wherever you are, let us renew them in our hearts today in union with this new brother of ours.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster