

Homily for the Mass of Installation as Archbishop of Southwark Feast of St James the Apostle, 25 July 2019



St George's Cathedral, Southwark

My dear friends

We have a hope in the Lord Jesus. As your new Archbishop, these are the most important first words I could ever say to you. In the Lord Jesus we have a hope for our world, a world which God created, a world which God loves. In Him we have a hope for our common humanity which God shared by taking flesh and dwelling among us. In the Lord Jesus we have a hope for the Church, Christ's Body, called to announce the Gospel with confidence and joy. In Him we have a hope for each other, that our lives have a purpose, a dignity and a destiny, that we can live in love, with justice, for peace. We have a hope in the Lord Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead, alive in His Church, alive in His Word, alive in His Sacraments. Dear friends we have a hope in the Lord Jesus, alive in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If any of you are surprised to see me standing here today, then let me reassure you that you're not as surprised as I am. Pope Francis spoke recently of three amazing realities within the life of faith: that *'God*

*calls, that 'God surprises,' and that 'God loves.'*¹ Everything in our life changes when we know we are loved by God in Christ. In fact, when we truly know this, at the core of our being, everything really begins in the most beautiful way. This love must surprise us continually, each day, in a new way, as God calls us forward in hope.

God's love is a death-defying love, brought to life in us through our baptismal commission to be bearers of Christ's light, to be witnesses of Christ's truth, and to be channels of Christ's compassion. We may be fragile vessels, mere earthenware jars, only too aware of our limitations and conscious of our unworthiness, but God pours into us the gifts, and the graces, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Whatever we have to face, whatever problems or difficulties, we do so certain that we carry within us the very life of the Lord Jesus.

It is with tremendous joy, but also a degree of apprehension, that I stand before you in this Mother Church of our Archdiocese. This inauguration of my service falls on the feast day of the Apostle St James, the great pilgrim of Compostela. Dear friends, together we will continue to make our pilgrimage of faith, trusting in the overwhelming power that comes, not from us, but from God. In this journey, each of us has a unique and essential place. For my part, I will do my very best to try and love you as a father, to try and walk beside you as a brother, and to try and serve you as a friend. If the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, came not to be served, but to give Himself in service, how on earth could I claim to love and follow Him without desiring to do the same? I seek to make His words my own: *'I come among you as one who serves.'*²

This Cathedral houses a shrine to St Oscar Romero, the remarkable Archbishop of San Salvador, martyred in 1980. I was just seventeen when I first read a book of quotations from his homilies. I've never forgotten the title. It was called *'The Church is All of You.'*³ That truth is at the heart of our pilgrimage as the Body of Christ. The Church is all of you, the Church is all of us, joined with Jesus Christ, our Head, and continuing His mission. In this, every Catholic is called to be an evangelising disciple. Each one of us has an irreplaceable part to play in the flourishing of God's kingdom. The Lord needs you. His Church needs you. This Archdiocese and its Archbishop, its parishes and its schools, needs you so that united in faith, here and now, we can announce anew the joy of the Good News, so that side by side we can serve the Lord Jesus in the downtrodden and in the despairing, in the weakest and in the poorest.

Ever since my episcopal ordination in 2016, and particularly in recent weeks, I've found myself asking the question: What does it mean to be a Bishop? I could spend hours attempting to provide an answer, but please don't worry, I'm not going to. As the Bishop of Santiago de Maria, St Oscar Romero wrote a short article about the bishop's ministry. Quoting his friend, Cardinal Pironio, he said this: *'A bishop can communicate the things of God and interpret human history and human problems only in terms of the depth of faith...He is simply a man of God in the service of all his brothers and sisters...'* He continued: *'A bishop is not a technician, an administrator, or a boss. A bishop is essentially a pastor, a father, a brother and a friend. He journeys with other people, sows hope along their path, shares their sorrow and joy, urges them to seek peace, [...] justice and love, and teaches them to be brothers and sisters...'*⁴ These are wise words which I take to heart today.

As you saw, an important part of the installation liturgy is when the new Bishop is seated in his *cathedra*, his chair. I am acutely aware that the Lord Jesus has a warning for anyone who might sit upon a throne. When the mother of St James asked Him to give her two sons seats of honour in His kingdom, He in turn asked them a question: *'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?'* With these words the Lord Jesus signalled that following Him means sharing in His cross. Can we drink the cup that He drank? In a sense, we do this whenever we experience suffering, whether personally or in the lives of those around us and in our world. We must always be a Church of Simons of Cyrene, a Church of Veronicas, who help carry others' burdens, who wipe the faces of the distressed.

But sharing the cup of the Lord Jesus has another sense too. It means trusting that through the power of the cross everything that is deadly, everything that is destructive, everything that is degrading and disrespectful of human life, can, and will, ultimately be transformed. Christ's death and resurrection is the sole source of our witness. We can speak and act only because, first, we believe. We believe that *'he who raised the Lord Jesus to life will raise us,'* in fullness on the last day, but also in anticipation, today and every day.

Shortly after my nomination as Metropolitan Archbishop I had the enormous privilege of travelling to Rome to receive the Pallium from Pope Francis. From today onwards I will wear this ancient and tangible sign of communion with the Holy Father and the Apostolic See. Through this woven band of lambswool I am yoked to the Successor of Peter and the truth of the Church's faith. The ministry

of those first Apostles continues to this moment, here in the Church of Southwark, through an unbroken succession down the ages.

The Pallium also reminds me to exercise my ministry with the heart of the Good Shepherd. Without exception, I must care for those the Lord entrusts to me, looking out especially for the lost, the broken, and the wounded, lifting them up and carrying them home. Someone once commented that it would be ridiculous for a shepherd to leave the whole flock in search of one sheep who's gone astray. Ridiculous, of course, unless that one sheep is you or someone you love. As bishops, priests, and deacons, we share the special responsibility for shepherding the hundred, not just the ninety-nine.⁵

The crosses on this Pallium, and the three Pallium Pins representing the nails that pierced our Lord's hands and feet, keep me attentive to those who share in Christ's suffering. I think of St John Paul II's words when, visiting this Cathedral in 1982, he spoke in defence of the sick and the elderly, of the disabled and the dying. *'Without the presence of these people in your midst,'* he said *'you might be tempted to think of health, strength and power as the only important values to be pursued in life. But the wisdom of Christ and the power of Christ are to be seen in the weakness of those who share his sufferings.'*

Dear friends, today I begin with you an adventure of grace as we walk together along the path of God's merciful love. It made me smile when I discovered that the scallop shell, the sign of St James the Apostle and of the pilgrim journey, has the Latin name *Gloriapallium*, the *'cloak of glory.'* As we journey in faith and hope, seeking holiness, may we be clothed with the providence of God's

glory so that our unity and service might sanctify us and the whole world.

Please pray for me as I promise to pray for you. Please ask our Blessed Lady to draw me, through her Immaculate Heart, ever closer to the Sacred Heart of her Son.

And so then to God, who by His power at work within us can do more than we ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.⁶

Most Rev John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark



Archdiocese of Southwark

¹ Pope Francis, *Homily*, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Bulgaria and North Macedonia, Knyaz Alexander I Square (Sofia) Sunday, 5 May 2019.

² Luke 22:27.

³ James R Brockman, Ed, *The Church is all of You – Thoughts of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, Collins, London, 1985.

⁴ Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *Oscar Romero – Prophet of Hope*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2015, 49. Taken from the original Oscar Romero, *La Voz del Pastor*, 'El Obispo es Pastor,' *El Apostol*, 4 Jan, 1976, N 17, 3.

⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 309.

⁶ See Ephesians 2:20-21.