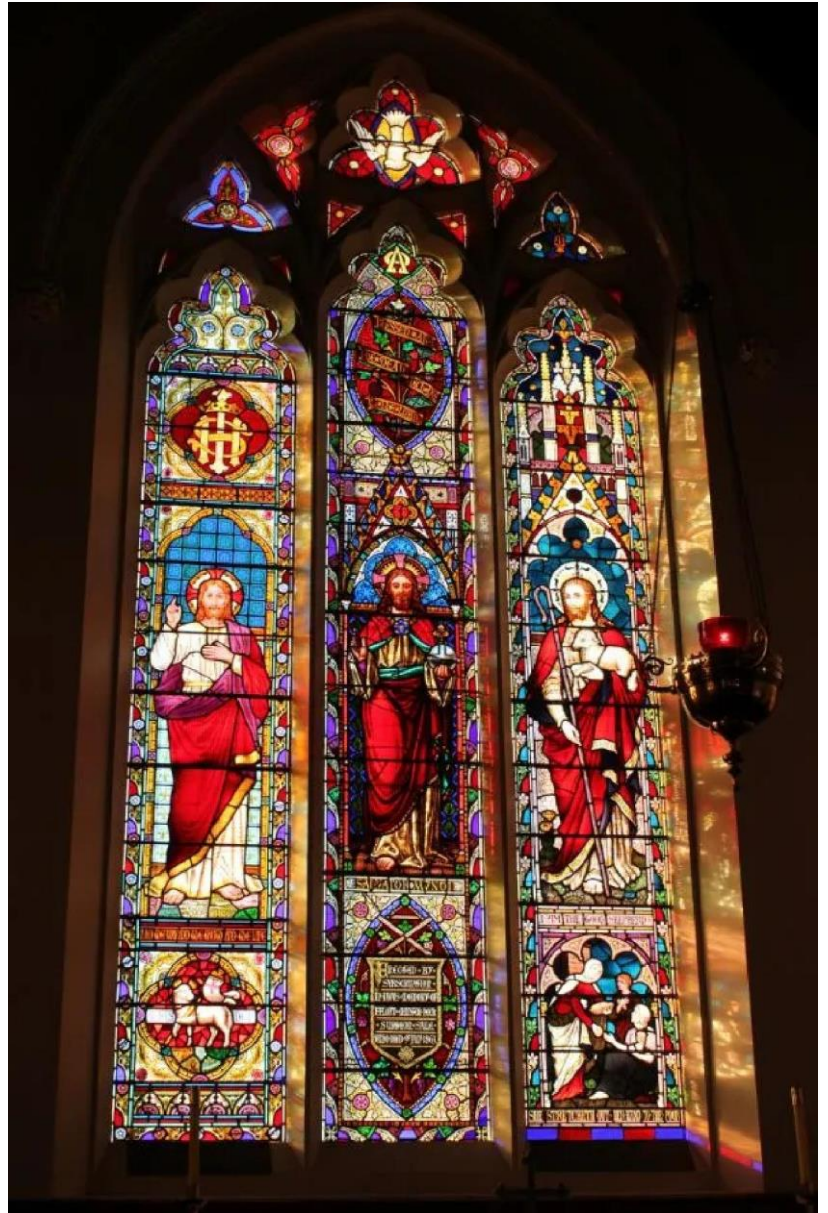


Ordination to the Priesthood – Damien King and Bec Hayman

St Paul's Cathedral, Sale
14 September 2024

Texts: Phil 2:5-11, John 3:13-17

You can learn a lot about a diocese, its history, its culture, its understanding of ministry from what is behind the high altar of its cathedral. Every big event, every ordination, every synod eucharist, every chrism eucharist, every enthronement, the people of the diocese are sitting here in the pews, looking at what's straight ahead of them. Eventually, that starts to rub off, and begins to shape people. In Bendigo, it's a window of Christ preaching to the crowds, Christ the teacher, very fitting in a diocese where teaching and preaching are growing in stature as the measure of ministry. In Melbourne, it is an enormous mosaic behind the high altar, the crucifixion. Quite a few people who have ministered in Melbourne will resonate with that! In Wangaratta, it is not a window or a mosaic, but a statue, an enormous statue of Christ the King, Christ wearing a chasuble, the vestment of a priest, and the crown of a king. Fitting, in a diocese where not too long ago, and sometimes still, it's "Father knows best", a very top-down model of ministry, each rector ruling their parish like a king his kingdom.



But not here. Here, it is almost as if God says, "I know you Gippslanders, you wild, spirit-led, free-thinking, diverse bunch. One Jesus is not enough for you – I will give you three." And so we have, left to right, three images of Christ -- Christ the Teacher, Christ the Leader and Christ the Pastor (=Priest). This arrangement is no accident. We are looking in this window at an ancient understanding of Christ's ministry, the threefold office, or *munus triplex* to use its Latin name – Christ as prophet, priest and king. Just as Jesus in our Gospel today, the Son of Man, fulfils (and surpasses) the same action as Moses, being lifted up to the salvation of many, so Christians from early times understood the ministry of Jesus to be the fulfilment and the surpassing of the ministries of prophets, priest and kings among the people of God in the Hebrew scriptures – compared to Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, Christ is the true prophet, the true king, the true priest. We saw St Paul making this move more than once as we

worked through 2 Corinthians on retreat. The theology of it was first articulated by the second century thinker Justin Martyr around 150 CE, and became central to thinking about ministry for such giants as Eusebius, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley and Karl Barth.

Bec and Damien, long after I am gone, you will be sitting here year in, year out, synod eucharist after synod eucharist, along with everyone else, looking at these three models of ministry, or better said perhaps, at these three aspects of the work of Christ, work in which we and all baptised people share. There is enough material in this window for half a dozen ordination sermons, but I am not going to deliver them all this morning. I want, instead, to offer the two of you three little notes about this window, as you begin your journey as priests in the Church of God.

First, God was right to give us here in Gippsland three images not just one. Everyone here values or resonates with these three aspects but in different degrees. Some see themselves as teachers and preachers, some primarily as pastors, some connect most with the servant kinship of Jesus, very rarely is it an equal three-way split; each person's blend is unique. And as we follow where the spirit leads us in this mix, we develop different and unique styles of ministry, different ways of being a person in ministry. What's special about Gippsland is that here these differences are accepted and celebrated. The fellowship we enjoy here is not based on us all being the same, but on a respect for diversity in which everyone finds a place. In diocesan events of the future, when the anthem is too long, or the sermon a bit boring or a bit weird or the offertory hymn enters its eighth verse, and the mind wanders, send up a little prayer of thanks for this. It's one of God's great gifts to you today that you are being ordained priest in a diocese in which you are surrounded by such diverse examples of ministry and in which you are encouraged to develop your own gifts in the years ahead however the Spirit leads you. Take it from me, who has long ministered elsewhere, if – God forbid – you should ever leave Gippsland, you will miss this easy and relaxed acceptance of being different together.

Secondly, when Paul in our epistle today urges us to have the same mind in us that was in Christ and to be servants, these three images in front of you are what he means. Teach with the same mind with which Christ teaches, pastor with the same mind with which Christ pastors, lead with the same mind with which Christ leads. And do all three, like Christ, in the form of a servant. Now that you are about to be priested, don't get all hoity-toity or precious, or let yourself become too important or too busy to muck in, and get your hands dirty in whatever is going on – washing dishes, working bees, volunteering in the CFA, folding parish magazines or helping with the maintenance of the community hall, whatever it is – you will find that it is some of the best teaching and preaching you will do, some of the best pastoral care you can offer and some of the best leadership you will ever show. As deacons, you know this already. Deacons are gifts from God that show us how Christ-like service lays at the heart of ministry. Don't let the responsibilities of priesthood, which are many and weighty, allow you to forget that you remain a deacon too.

Lastly, the emptying, the self-giving. Paul shows us the example of Jesus emptying himself and calls us to a life of self-giving after his example. And, Damien and Bec, – spoiler alert – there will be lots of self-giving ahead, so much

that at times you will be called to give and give until the tank gets dry and you feel that you are running on empty. And we know from Paul's warning elsewhere that ministers who run on empty run are the danger of being just noisy gongs or clanging cymbals. Or worse. We are smarter now, more alert to the need to make sure you refill and refresh yourselves, more aware of the importance of self-care, of finding ways to recharge. Good thing too. I want to finish by sharing with you a story that illustrates how that recharging most often happens for me, a story that might be helpful for you too.

Once upon a time, a fair while ago now, I was the rector of Ararat, over the other side of Victoria, in the shadow of the Grampians. We had a big churchyard, a large paddock really, with a mowing roster on which everyone, including me, took a turn. I often had trouble getting the big green self-propelled mower to start. So there I was one afternoon, standing out in the paddock, pulling endlessly on the starter cord. No result. Pulling harder. No result. Pulling harder, hard enough to overbalance. No result. As I'm working away, I see an unwelcoming sight. It's Gavin, the rector's warden, coming around the side of the church, catching me at the most embarrassing time. Even in the distance, I can see him shaking his head as he walks up. "Why", I hear his words today as clear as I did then, "why did they send us a priest from the city". If he's not driving his petrol car over the stubble, then he's scheduling working bees in the middle of harvest, when we all need to be on the headers, and now this. Tsk. Tsk. Gavin takes a small yellow and black spray can out of his pocket, sprays it over the carburettor, gives it a tug, and woof, up it starts. Everyone knows you need this, he tells me, turning the label round so I could see the name of the product, you need a can of "Start Ya Bastard" (Pardon my French).

Ten years ago that was. Now every time I look at these three images of Christ behind the altar I think of Gavin and all the others who over the years while I was ministering to them, were in fact ministering to me, and not just in mower maintenance. When I ran low or even got to empty, the people in the parish around me were the ones that got me started again, they were by their example and kindness, the teachers, the pastors, the leaders I needed to get a kick-start and then, recharged and refilled, to start going again. We spoke on retreat about how no one remembers what was said at their ordination retreat or in the sermon at the event itself. If you forget everything else, I hope you will remember this – remember to keep your eyes and hearts open to how the people of God around you are teaching, pastoring and leading you. Even as your energy runs low and your sense of self gets shaky, as it most certainly will, more than once, I hope that always for you as there has been for me, someone is just around the corner ready to whip out of their pocket a can of "Start Ya Bastard".

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