

# Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Mark Davies

22 February 2010

St Anthony's Church, Wythenshawe, Manchester

## Homily: The Archbishop of Birmingham, the Most Reverend Bernard Longley

*On this rock I will build my Church.*

As we gather here at St Anthony's today there is a powerful sense of expectancy. A hope has been born within us that is about to be fulfilled – a promise has been received and it is going to be kept. The foundation for our hope is the word of Christ himself when he assures us: I will build my Church. This building of the Church is first and foremost the work of our Lord himself – *nihil sine Christo* - and he continues to build up the body of his faithful in each generation and in every place through the power of the Holy Spirit. This hope is fulfilled anew in the Episcopal Ordination of Mgr Mark Davies.

We are aware as Catholics of the way that this promise of Christ's has been kept faithfully and continuously within the Church from that moment when it was first uttered by our Lord at Caesarea Philippi in front of Simon Peter and the disciples. His promise will have been a source of hope and strength to them as they began the mission that he had entrusted to them. It is a blessing for us that the Evangelist has recorded and highlighted the promise and intention of Christ so that it stands before us in our own day, and continues to strengthen our hope at this important moment in the life of the Diocese of Shrewsbury.

I will build my Church. This is the intention of the Lord both for the Church of this diocese and for the Church that is spread throughout the world. What is to happen here in our presence is central to the life of the local Church but it is also significant within the life of the universal Church. A new bishop will be ordained for the service of God's people in Shrewsbury diocese and will also take his place alongside the college of bishops who are united with the successor of Peter. We will never forget that our Lord's words always draw us into the presence of the apostle Peter whenever we hear him say: upon this rock I will build my Church.

For this reason Bishop Brian will ask if there is a mandate from the Holy See when the new bishop is presented – and that is why the presence of our Apostolic Nuncio is precious to us as the Holy Father's representative on this occasion. As Mgr Mark is ordained bishop he is bound in faith and sacramental life and dedicated service not only to those entrusted to his care but also, alongside the bishops, with the successor of Peter who will support and strengthen him as a brother.

Dear Bishop-elect Mark, in the introduction to our Service Books today you have written about the impact upon yourself of being with all the bishops on our recent *Ad Limina* visit to Rome, and in particular about what it meant for you and Bishop Brian to meet with Pope Benedict. You highlight the significance of beginning your new ministry on the Feast of the Chair of St Peter - that chair around which we were all so recently gathered on our pilgrimage – and the importance of celebrating that vital bond of faith and loyalty with the Holy See which unites us today in the closest communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter, our Holy Father, the Pope.

Even before your Episcopal Ordination, during those remarkable days in Rome, you have already experienced the bonds of faith and affection that unite us as bishops together. Now you will share in the same ministry alongside Bishop Brian, maintaining unity among the

priests, religious and lay faithful of this diocese as the Word of God is proclaimed and the Sacraments are celebrated for the up-building of the Church.

The Episcopal Ordination is an important symbolic moment for the ordering of the life of the Church of Shrewsbury Diocese. But it is more than that, for it is a Sacramental moment too – a moment in which a gift is offered on our behalf by Christ to his Father and at the same time transformed by the Holy Spirit's power and returned to us for our benefit. Today the gift that is offered and again transformed is the priestly life and witness of the new bishop himself, as he becomes more fully configured to the Priesthood of Christ.

It is Christ who brings about this change, fashioning a ministry that is new for the service of his people here and a new reality in the life of the man who is being ordained. At the deepest level the Sacrament of Orders re-orientates the direction of our lives, setting what the Church has sometimes spoken of as the imprint of a character upon the soul. It is a change that only Christ could bring about within us by the power of his Holy Spirit - a change that reveals itself in the ministry beginning today.

Such a change at the level of identity is also reflected in the familiar and beautiful exchange between our Lord and St Peter in St Matthew's Gospel. We see a moment of recognition and revelation as our Lord looks not only into Peter's eyes but surely into his soul. Who do you say I am? It is a question asking whoever answers to search deeply within, and to continue searching until he find Peter's affirmation: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

When God's grace enables us to recognise the Christ it also reveals to us our own true identity and mission: So now I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. In finding Christ Peter now finds himself and sees more deeply into his calling. It belongs only to Christ to bind and loose on earth and in heaven, yet now Peter is to share this influence upon human lives.

The same Christ now calls Bishop Mark to find himself truly in his new ministry and among the priests and people to whom he has been sent. By the laying-on of hands and the prayer of the Church our Lord shares the fullness of his Priesthood so that he can build his Church afresh in this place and for this generation of his faithful – and he builds his Church by sending another shepherd and teacher to lead and nourish his holy people.

In a few minutes time the new bishop will receive from Bishop Brian the pastoral staff as a sign that he is called to keep watch over the whole flock. He may grasp that staff with confidence because he has also been called to follow the Good Shepherd, leading his people Christ-ward. On the Feast of the Chair of St Peter Bishop Mark will be taken to sit upon his chair as teacher of the faith. He may always speak with assurance once he has bowed his head in trust beneath the Book of the Gospels.

St Matthew's Gospel tells us that our Lord put his question to Peter and the disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Opinions vary as to the exact location and perhaps it doesn't matter very much. Even so, at the spot known today as Baniyas and often identified with the scene, a rock-face that is sheer and imposing towers up to a great height. At its foot many springs pour out and become one of the sources of the River Jordan.

The rock on which Christ builds his Church is not only firm but it is life-giving, the source of grace pouring out like living waters to refresh and heal. As sacramental grace now changes Bishop Mark's life may his ministry as bishop always be dependable as he confirms the faith of others – may it also be the source of refreshment and healing, bringing Christ's life and light to the flock entrusted to his care throughout the years that lie ahead.