

²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

John 20:21

First of all, can I say what a delight it is for me to be here as Bishop Pat introduces Ruth to the Parish of Clane as Part-time Priest. I would just like to thank the Bishop for the privilege of being here.

Ruth and I go back a long way – back to 1978 to be precise when I arrived in the Parish of Raheny & Coolock as Curate and Ruth and her family were members of the Parish of Coolock and active in the life of the Church. For the two terms I taught RE in Mount Temple School on a temporary basis, Ruth was in one of my classes. Our paths will have crossed from time to time and then we welcomed Ruth to the Parish of Howth on her initial Parish placement in her training for the ordained ministry, where she quickly gained the affection of the Parish for her brief stay with us.

So it is a joy and a privilege to commend her to the Parish of Clane at the beginning of her ministry among you.

I want to begin by asking two questions; one of Ruth and one of the Parish of Clane.

Ruth, what is your vision for your ministry here in Clane?

Clane, what are you looking for in Ruth?

My wife and I knew a lovely old couple when we came to live in Howth. Bill is a retired Presbyterian minister. One night, Madge, who has since died, said

she didn't feel like cooking that night. To which Bill replied, 'Well what are you here for?' Bill is not a modern man but I still think he was lucky to have survived that one.

So maybe we could combine my two questions that I have just posed and simply ask; 'What is Ruth here for?'

I want to begin with the passage we read from Isaiah, which will have been read as the Lesson at Ruth's Ordination to the Priesthood:

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; *Isaiah 61:1-2*

And to set that alongside one of the promises that Ruth will have made at her Ordination:

Will you be diligent in prayer, in reading holy Scripture, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to uphold the truth of the Gospel?

Answer By the help of God, I will.

Ruth, after you took your vows, after the laying on of hands in ordination, Archbishop Michael, as he prepared to lead us all in prayer, reminded you, reminded the rest of us:

Because none of us can bear the weight of this ministry in our own strength, but only by the grace and power of God,

‘Only by the grace and power of God.....’ How often, in the busy-ness, do we so often lose sight of that. Let me offer you two pictures – one general, one rather more personal – as we try to reflect on that. Have you ever found yourself on a car journey; the petrol tank is running low, edging towards the empty mark? ‘Sure, we’ll make it home – we’ll get petrol tomorrow.’ Then the orange light goes on, first flashing then constant – we realise we are running on empty.

The other one as I say is more personal. I recall when I was in Mountmellick, around 30 years ago. I was at a diocesan conference and Bishop Walton Empey came across to me with his characteristically cheery, ‘Kevin, how are things in Mountmellick?’ For some reason I did not give the natural reply of the clergy when asked such questions by their bishop – ‘Wonderful, Bishop.’ Instead I said I wasn’t looking for a move but I was feeling rather flat. He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘Kevin, the prayer life has gone, hasn’t it?’ He’d hit the nail on the head. I realised I was running on empty.

He packed me off to Glenstall for a few days. It was just what I needed. I learned the wisdom of the words Pope John Paul 2nd said to students in Maynooth when he was in Ireland. ‘We can be so busy in the work of the Lord that we forget the Lord of the work.’ I wish I could say that that was the last time I found myself running on empty – but at least I now know what I have to do.

Ruth, in the years to come, you will be asked to do many things in addition to your leading of worship and your pastoral work, in the course of your ministry – chairing meetings of Vestry, of Boards of Management along with washing up, locking up, setting up tables, putting away tables, cutting grass, weeding

paths. It is right that we should share the load of these ordinary tasks with members of our Parishes. But we must never lose sight of why we are here. And so, you were asked:

Do you believe and accept the Holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer **I do.**

Do you believe and accept the doctrine of the Christian faith as the Church of Ireland has received it?

Answer **I do.**

In your ministry will you expound the Scriptures and teach that doctrine?

Answer **By the help of God, I will.**

Our ministry, our whole ministry, must be built on the bed rock of our commitment to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That must come through in our ministry of teaching, our pastoral work and yes even in the stacking of chairs, the clearing of weeds. We live in a world of hierarchies and even in the life of the Church it is easy to slip into the mindset of hierarchies.

In Luke's Gospel, we read of Jesus reminding his disciples

"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ²⁷ But I am among you as one who serves. *Luke 22:25-27*

An integral part of ministry is service, your pastoral ministry in which you sit alongside people in their joys and sorrows, in which you listen and pray with them and for them. Your pastoral ministry and your ministry of word and sacrament are not separate – they are two sides of the same coin. Your pastoral

ministry will enrich your teaching ministry and your teaching ministry will enrich your pastoral ministry.

If you are to care for, to minister to others, you must also learn to care for, to minister to yourself. I come back to those words of Pope John Paul 2nd; ‘We can be so busy in the work of the Lord that we forget the Lord of the work.’ So guard those spaces for prayer, for private reflection, for thinking. In our busy-ness they can be the first to go. Guard those times with Martin and the family, relish those times when you just allow yourself to do nothing. Switch off the mobile phone, forget the emails and the texts and relax. We do ourselves no favours; we do our parishioners no favours, and, quite frankly, we do no honour to our Lord if we allow ourselves to be drained physically, mentally and spiritually. We actually fail the people committed to our charge.

People of Clane, I invite you to ask of yourselves, ‘What is Ruth here for?’ What are your expectations of Ruth? You are looking for leadership and inspiration, who will lead you in worship, who will accompany you along your own journey of faith. You are looking for someone who will be out and about among you, someone with whom you can share your hopes and your fears, who will be with you in times of sickness and bereavement and in those times of joy as you celebrate births and marriages; someone who will become your friend.

But she is not here to bear the total load of ministry. She is being introduced to you in her role as ‘Part Time Priest’. I want to reflect on what that does and does not mean. Does this mean that the ministry of the Church of Ireland is here only on a part-time basis? I recall towards the end of my time in Mountmellick, St Manman’s in Clonaslee had been scheduled for closure. I remember reflecting with the congregation on this. I reminded them that the closure of the Church did not mean that the Church of Ireland was pulling out of Clonaslee because they were, and would continue to be, the Church of Ireland in Clonaslee. So, you the people of Clane are the Church of Ireland in Clane. You are entering on a new phase in the history of your Parish, in your ministry as the people of God in this place.

A major part of Ruth’s ministry among you will be to encourage and empower you in your own ministry, to grow in your ministry to each other and the wider community in simple acts of service and of understanding; to play your part in the ministry of the Church in participation in the worship of the Church, in Sunday School, in youth activity, in supporting each other.

You will have a ministry to Ruth in allowing her time and space - for personal prayer and reflection, for time with Martin and the family, for time and space to let her be Ruth in whatever interests she wants to pursue. And just remember her in your own prayers, for she will most certainly be remembering you.

It is with great pleasure that I commend Ruth to you. You will come to discover a person with a warm and generous heart and with a deep and sincere faith. Cherish her – for she will most certainly cherish you.