



HOMILY OF MOST. REV. BERNARD LONGLEY, ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

Given at the National Mass, Parish Church of Ss Mary and John, Wolverhampton, 25 September 2021

Transcript

I'm very grateful as I said earlier, for the representation here today of the Central Council of the Guild and for Fr Dennis Touw [National Director of the Guild] who can't be with us today. I am also grateful here in the Archdiocese to our Vocations team based at St Mary's College, Oscott, and I thank them for being here today, especially to Mrs Kathryn Bayliss [Assistant to the Vocations Director], for her hard work, supported by the Vocations team in preparing this occasion. My thanks also to Fr Craig Szmidt [Birmingham Diocesan Director of the Guild].

As I travel around our diocese, celebrating special Masses in our schools or parishes I always try to have the opportunity, especially before Mass begins, to greet and have a word with the local Altar Servers. A chance to thank those who play an important part in the church's liturgy in their church or school setting. Whenever I visit a parish on a weekend visitation, I see servers young and old fulfilling their regular duties at the side of the priest or deacon. On certain occasions, such as Confirmations, we need our Servers to undertake particular duties for that ceremony and they are always grateful, and available and supportive, and I know I speak for our priests and deacons when I say Thank You for that readiness to serve, to be so generous with your time.

It is a notable feature of the Catholic Church in England and Wales that in our 23 dioceses, there is no lack of young people, boys and girls who are willing to step forward to make the commitment to serve.

Many of you will remember the first time you were called to serve, taking those tentative steps, guided by those other servers and others in the parish to gain the confidence you needed to be up there in front of everybody else, doing the things that were necessary to enable God's holy people to enter into the liturgy and to worship God together.

I think that commitment is so important, it's a real expression of your Christian discipleship and it shows the importance that you place on your faith and on your friendship with our Lord.

Becoming an Altar Server first of all needs your own involvement and interest in the life of your parish community, and I know that is often accomplished by the example of the other servers in your parish, perhaps your brothers and sisters, maybe your friends.

Being a server requires dedication and commitment. It also requires concentration on what you are doing and a desire to serve others, and I realise that some of you have been showing those qualities and living by them for many years, and I salute the senior Altar Servers who are with us today and thank them for their many years of dedicated service that you represent and the encouragement that you kindly give to our younger servers.

Becoming an Altar Server then, and being an Altar Server takes that dedication and commitment. Thank you for remaining in the presence of the Lord, at the Altar, in the Sanctuary, and for continuing to support your Parish Priests and Deacons in this unique public ministry.

When you were very young this commitment also benefits from the support and interest of your parents, and I thank the members of your families who have come here today to support this occasion as well as other family members who can't be with us today.

I realise that for some of you, your parents have been Altar Servers themselves, members of the Guild, and some may continue to serve, and many are active in other ways in the life of the parish, in the liturgy, in the parish social outreach, within our schools and chaplaincies and in other forms. Being a server equips you to take on those roles of leadership which the church greatly needs today. You are very much in our thanks.

I think that serving at the altar gives you a particular type of confidence, not just self-confidence, but a confidence in what the Lord is calling you to do and to be. A confidence built on your friendship with our Lord and His gift of the Holy Spirit. It reflects the trust that He has placed in you to look after the sacred vessels used in the Mass, to guide the people of God in prayer and to set a good example. You are very much in the public eye and your own manner of serving can influence many others.

In these ways I think you are sharing in the vision which we heard in today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, where we hear the words of St Stephen 'I can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' Every Altar Server stands in the privileged position close to the place where we believe heaven and earth come together in the divine liturgy. Everything you do in the course of your serving helps the people of God to experience that foretaste of the kingdom of God which we receive in the Mass.

St Matthew's Gospel today also reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who speaks and acts within us in the sacred liturgy. You are an example in the celebration of the Mass, you are helping to guide the people in the offertory procession, to bring the holy gifts to the Altar, you are sometimes beside the priest or deacon when he offers Holy Communion to members of the Parish Congregation. You witness the faith of others as you see at very close quarters what it means to them to receive our Lord in the Eucharist. This is a privilege and it's also a responsibility, I thank you for cherishing them both. In today's Mass I also thank the lay faithful in all these and any other duties in your parish communities.

In a moment it will be my privilege to invite you to renew your commitment to serve the people as you dedicate yourselves again as Altar Servers. Your service helps our Lord be present more effectively in your parish or school setting as the one who serves. You are a reminder that His presence is spread amongst the church through different ways of serving and each can be represented here today. As you now renew your Servers promises, we remember the services that Our Lord offers and inspires in others is always generous and always joyful.

May the Holy Spirit give you a generosity and joyfulness in the year ahead so your lives are called to witness to the presence of Christ the Server within your community.

RENEWAL OF SERVERS' PROMISES

Archbishop: Will you say the Guild Prayer every day?

Servers: I will, with the help of God.

Archbishop: Will you promise to do your best to serve regularly, particularly when you are needed?

Servers: I will, with the help of God.

Archbishop: Will you promise to serve with care and reverence?

Servers: I will, with the help of God.

Archbishop: Will you try to understand what you are doing when you serve?

Servers: I will, with the help of God.

Servers: I offer myself to God almighty, to Blessed Mary our mother and to our holy patron, Saint Stephen, and I promise to do my best to serve regularly with reverence and understanding, for the glory of God, the service of his Church and my own eternal salvation

Archbishop: And may God, who has begun this good work in you, bring it to fulfilment.