



Homily given by Bishop Anthony Randazzo
Bishop of Broken Bay

Ordination to the Diaconate – *Samuel French*
Saint Agatha's Church, 22 October 2020

Over the past week I have been reflecting upon this Mass in which Samuel French will be ordained to the responsibility of the diaconate. My initial reflections did not begin with the Scripture, nor did I start with the Ordination Rite. My preparations began in Bankstown in Western Sydney. To be precise, I was thinking about the milkman and the fruiterer from quite a few years ago. The milkman was none other than Sam's grandfather French and the fruiterer was my grandfather Randazzo.

I cannot help wondering what the two of them would be thinking today as one grandson, the bishop, ordains the other grandson, a deacon.

Both men worked hard in service industries. Of course, those were the days when milk was delivered door to door, not purchased at a supermarket. Fruit and vegetables were selected by hand, weighed, and bagged for the customer by the shop workers. Everyone drank milk and everyone ate fruit and veges. The milko and the local fruiterer knew their customers by name. They were known throughout the neighbourhood and they provided essential services to the community.

In this day and age, milk delivery and the selling of fruit and vegetables, along with Religion, seem to have been relegated to the non-essential services list. With so many food choices nowadays, one might be tempted to think that there is a touch of nostalgia in what I am saying. After all, it is not difficult to find something nourishing for our bodies in almost any shop or location. And that well might be true.

But what about spiritual nourishment? What about the enduring search for truth? What about the human search for meaning and the prevailing desire to encounter the creator of all things, seen and unseen?

The Christian faith contains all of this and more. The incarnation of the eternal Word of God; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the world is not fantasy; it is divinely revealed Truth. What is revealed in Jesus Christ is both the immanent and transcendent reality of God.

To believe and understand this demands both faith and reason. What matters most is that the believer's use of reason, together with the power of reflection, is the foundation to the search for truth. Beginning with the Word of God we are able to move towards a better understanding, and ultimately a fervent belief in God (cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 73).

My brothers and sisters, without a doubt, this is an essential need in our community and indeed in the world in which we live. Everyone has the right to freedom of religion, to manifest their religion in teaching, practice, worship, and observance ^(cf. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18, 10 Dec 1948). And yet, often when church leaders ask our public leaders what we can do to assist and serve in the community, we are met with indifference, ignored, or even told to step out of the conversation, as Religion does not hold a ticket in the essential item queue.

Samuel, what a wonderful time in history to be called to the ordained ministry as deacon. Clearly, the mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ is not for the faint-hearted. To be honest, it never has been, nor will it ever be.

Ours is not the first generation to suffer the indignity of social isolation or exclusion. To think otherwise would be to indulge in self-pity and to wallow in defeatism, which would be contrary to the very Gospel that we hope to proclaim.

As a deacon, you will be called to engage the world by remaining close to God's holy people. The deacon has the privilege of standing alongside the bishop while at the same time remaining near the people as he listens to their hopes, joys, and sufferings, and prays with and for them in the assembly of the Church ^(cf. Rite of Ordination, Promise of the Elect).

Saint Paul provides you with the model for this work in his letter to the Ephesians. On his knees, he implores God the Father to give strength of faith to the people, through the Holy Spirit, so that Christ may live in their hearts ^(Eph 3:14-17). What is the purpose of this prayer? Saint Paul tells us, that by receiving Christ, the people will become "planted in love and built on love" – both of God and one another. This love is the "fullness of God" and is a gift which "surpasses all knowledge" ^(Eph 3:17-19).

In a highly individualistic 21st century culture, the notion of serving others, giving priority to others, and interceding on their behalf, is radically countercultural. In serving others as a deacon, you will demonstrate that you deeply love and value the dignity of the human person. Through your *diakonia*, the community of the Church offers a Christian witness to human dignity and the authenticity of the human capacity to love.

Sam, as you are ordained to the responsibility of the diaconate, I offer to you Saint John Paul II as your heavenly patron. Always a man among the people, he never compromised his faith. With both faith and reason, he argued for human dignity especially in the face of tyranny and violence. He opposed State suppression of Religion, not only through clear and faithful teaching, but most importantly with a Christian witness and invitation to love.

As a deacon, you will first and foremost be a man of charity. The fire that Jesus brings to the earth ^(cf. Luke 12:49) is not one of destruction, like the bush fires we experienced earlier this year. His is the fire of love. His fire burns away hatred. It purifies sin and evil, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, it sheds light upon our darkness. It fills the heart with courage. It is a fire that stokes the belly, giving energy and purpose to the work of God that is to be entrusted to you as one who serves.

My sisters and brothers, in the words of Saint John Paul II, “*The sacramental grace of the diaconate... in addition to being a valuable help in carrying out various tasks, deeply affects the deacon’s heart, spurring him to offer, to give his whole self to serving the kingdom of God in the Church*” (General Audience, 6 Oct 1993). As we now pray for this man Sam, our brother, may he become a sign of Christ’s love and service in the world.

May Mary, Star of the Sea, guide you Sam, and may Saint John Paul II inspire you to love and serve God’s holy people as deacon.