



DIOCESE OF  
**Bath & Wells**

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## **Bishop Ruth's Charge to our new Priests in Bath and Wells Peter-tide 2021**

*"... Know yourselves loved"* were the words I left you with last year at the end of my Charge, as you went on your retreat before being ordained as deacons. Today I want to echo those as we read the words of the passage we have been dwelling on throughout this year.

*'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'*

*Colossians 3:12-17*

There is a sermon in every phrase and yet I often find myself getting no further than the first few words. **Chosen, Holy, Beloved.** And that is what you are. **Chosen**, not because of the intense and possibly long process of discerning your vocation to priesthood, but because you belong to God. **Holy**, not because of any achievements of your own, but because of Christ's righteousness. **Beloved**, not just by your family and friends, but by a Father who invites you to 'be loved'.

As you take on the role of priest, please remember that your identity is not to be found in a stole rearranged, sacraments you can now offer, but rather the deepening understanding that you are a child of God.

Tomorrow I shall be telling the congregation what being a priest means and how your ministry will be exercised, just ahead of your arrival into the Cathedral. You may not hear them as you focus on the procession so hear how the preface ends...

*'...that we **all** may grow into the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice acceptable to God.'*

Your ministry as priest will only be of any real value to others if you allow Christ to minister to you too. Your priestly ministry will bear fruit if you encounter Him as priest. It is that daily encounter that will make the act of clothing yourselves with the graces that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Colossians, become a godly habit, rather than a conscious act of dressing up whilst watching oneself in the mirror.

*'...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.'*

You know already that ministry is far from straightforward or easy. There will be difficult situations and challenging people. It was just the same in the church at Colossae. Bearing with each other, forgiving one another, would have been as necessary then as now. But reminding ourselves of God's forgiveness for us and clothing ourselves in the knowledge that we are **Beloved** will help us to receive the peace of Christ, stilling our own anxieties, and giving us the presence of His power to transform.

What strikes me about the final phrases of this passage is the attitude which Paul encourages the Colossian Christians to have, one of thankfulness and gratitude. Not always easy when life is tough. However, this isn't about mood but rather of will. At those moments, when we feel life is unfair, people have hurt us, the weight of responsibility lies heavy, that is the very moment we seek the presence of God who calls us **Beloved**.

Personally I have found the Ignatian practice of the Examen has been so helpful for me in this. Recognising at the end of each day those things for which I am thankful and noticing too those for which I am less than thankful. Leaving the latter in God's hands and returning my thanks to Him for His love. It heightens my awareness that I am **Beloved**.

And as a priest, then I have found the offering of the Eucharist, the proclaiming of the Thanksgiving prayer as we break bread, have helped me to be grateful for all we are as Church, the brokenness as well as the beauty. Something you may find helpful as I have over the years is this. Having shared some particularly distressing and painful ministry situation with my Spiritual Director one day, he advised me to write the name of the person concerned on a piece of paper and slip it under the cloth on the altar. As I blessed and broke the bread that Sunday I was aware that I did so on behalf of that person whose situation only God and I were aware of. Blessing and breaking, I remembered that we were both **Beloved**.

Sisters and brothers, may God's peace rule in your hearts and minds as you come to offer yourselves as priests in the Church of God. **Be loved!**

With every blessing.

**Bishop Ruth**  
**Bishop of Taunton**  
June 25<sup>th</sup> 2021

