

Homily for the Induction of Fr Michael Mahady
As Parish Priest of 55 John Fisher and Thomas More in Burley-in-Wharfedale
Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, Thursday 9th November 2017

I am delighted to be here this evening for the induction of Fr Michael Mahady as Parish Priest of St John Fisher and St Thomas More in Burley-in-Wharfedale. I welcome all of you who have joined us for this special occasion.

'Induction' is an odd word. It means though, essentially, a formal introduction of someone into a new role through a special ceremony. Today, in the ceremony which is about to take place, Fr Michael, will officially begin his duties as the shepherd of this parish.

I pray that you will welcome him and support him in the leadership which he must give in all aspects of parish life - worship, teaching, and governance, so that the Parish of St John Fisher and St Thomas More will be a place of faith and intense Christian living. I know that Fr Michael will strive with all his heart and strength to serve you faithfully and generously.

In the opening collect for the Mass, the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, I prayed on behalf of all us gathered here, these words: "O God, who from living and chosen stones prepare an eternal dwelling for your majesty, increase in your Church the spirit of grace you have bestowed, so that by new growth your faithful people may build up the heavenly Jerusalem." This is, in many ways, a most ideal prayer for a parish on the occasion of the induction of a new Parish Priest. It is a reminder that the priest and people of a parish have a common vocation and mission - to be living stones building-up the Church of God in their local area.

In the Gospel reading we listened to from St John, we heard about the zeal that Our Lord Jesus Christ showed for the holiness of His Father's house, symbolized at that time by the Temple in Jerusalem. He drove out all those who were selling goods and changing money there, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market.' He said, and His disciples remembered the words of scripture: 'Zeal for your house will devour me'

The Temple in Jerusalem was meant to be a place that expressed the Holiness of God and invited people into His presence. The only Temple that could truly fulfil that purpose though was not one made by human hands but that which was fashioned by God Himself; this Temple was the incarnate Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Christ's will, through the gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist, to dwell in a holy temple made of living stones; that is, us, the members of the one people of God, the new Israel.

Today's feast celebrates an ever-current mystery: that God desires to build himself a spiritual temple in the world, a community that adores him in spirit and truth. You, the people of this parish, together with your new parish priest, are the visible presence of that holy temple made of living stones in this local area; and, like the vision in the first reading from the prophet Ezekiel, living water will flow from this temple, and bring life to the world around it.

In sending Fr Michael to you as your parish priest, I am confident that he will build upon the good work of all those who have ministered as priests in this church, in this temple, over the years. A good parish priest will try always only ever to build upon what has gone before him, not to tear it down. He knows that a parish priest is only a servant and a steward of the parish entrusted to his care, never its master or owner. And this evening, I know that I am inducting for you a really outstanding parish priest whose gentle yet strong missionary zeal will only ever seek to build-up the people - the living stones - he serves, and never tear them down.

Essential to the rite of induction which we are about to celebrate is the assurance that you, the parishioners of this parish, will give to Fr Michael to support him in his ministry through your prayers, your collaboration and your own pastoral zeal. This is most important. His ministry will rely heavily on your faith, your love, your hope and the personal talents and gifts which all of you have to offer for the common good of your parish and to make the Church in your local community a living sign of God's love and mercy

Whenever in the past I had to leave a parish to take up a new parish or new assignment in the Church, my parishioners were always extremely generous in expressing their thanks to me for the time I had been their Priest. In truth though I can assure you, I always felt and knew that they had given me so much, much more than I had ever to given them. Yes, it is the duty of the parish priest, the shepherd, to spiritually feed the faith and lives of his flock but - and it is important that we remember this - that your parish priest's faith and life too, in turn, needs to be spiritually fed and built up by you.

So, my dear people, pray for your new parish priest, pray for Fr Michael, that he will be a true shepherd and father to you; and that, through his sacred ministry, he will help you to live out your vocation to give witness to Christ in your community and the world

✠ Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds