



THE RIGHT REVEREND GREGORY H. RICKEL, BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF OLYMPIA
ORDINATIONS TO THE SACRED ORDER OF PRIESTS,
ON THE COMMEMORATION OF EVELYN UNDERHILL, MYSTIC & WRITER, JUNE 15, 2021
WISDOM 7:24-8:1; PSALM 96:7-13; 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-10,13-16; JOHN 4:19-24

ORDINATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD

We come to contemplate our Christian treasure from inside. And we do that, this night, as we gather to ordain to the priesthood, three amazing and dedicated children of God, Gerry, Charissa, and Malcolm. And, on this night, we are also gifted in the church calendar to be celebrating the life, ministry, and witness of the mystic, writer, and guide, Evelyn Underhill. It is she, that in her work, *The Light of Christ*, wrote those words, “We come to contemplate our Christian treasure from inside.”

And I think, those words, are so very profound in any Christian walk, but certainly they have a different sound, as we emerge out of a pandemic, and are actually allowed, inside, once again. We have gotten a year of experience, of complete exposure, of marination you might say, in being outside. I think that is all so very important and so very relevant to the three of you, to the reason we gather tonight, to the very work you three sign up for, have worked, studied, prayed and patiently waited for. Tonight you are on the brink of that dream becoming true. You will, if I can finish this sermon in a timely manner, and nothing else untoward happens, will walk out of here tonight a Priest of the church.

I had a bishop of mine in the past describe ordinations as a place where you get all dressed

up for your Momma and then it’s all downhill from there.

Such a cynical view actually, but he may have had a point. I often say to aspirants, and no doubt you three have heard me tell it along the way, that I liken it to a few brides and grooms I have seen, who are far more in love with the wedding than they are the marriage. The same is true of this, and important to contemplate.

You three are entering this vocation at a strange time. We might argue that any time is strange to enter into this vocation, and I can go with that, but let’s face it, I think most of your colleagues would agree with me, you three may get the prize for the strangest at least in my lifetime. It is a time when vast parts of our society could really care less about the Church, finds it irrelevant and sadly, in some quarters, even a detriment to society. From within our ranks, we have lived through a year of Eucharistic fast, of meeting fast, of community fast, in ways we did not choose or wish for, and all of that has left many wondering, what will this all look like on the other side, what will we keep, what will we jettison for good, how will we be changed, do we want to be changed?

Before all of this many inside the church would opine that we just need to get rid of our properties, our churches, lighten our load, and I

am often sitting in that camp I have to say, and I think most of you have known me long enough to know, I also very much will stand up for our need for place, for an address, that we Christians, especially us Anglican ones, are for good and sometimes ill, a materialistic people, materialistic in the best sense, that things matter, that place matters, that physical objects are important for our journey to a deeper knowledge and love of God.

So that my favorite metaphor for a church property, the actual address, is the base camp. No one goes to a base camp to live forever. It is not seen, nor does it operate as a permanent space, location, or destination. It is temporary. It is there to help us heal, grow, learn, be fed, and all of those for one purpose, to send us on our way, to send us back out to the path, to help us keep walking.

That is what you are signing up for today. You are the keepers of the block, as in the square block, as in the parish, in its classic materialistic meaning, the actual place we gather, where our altar is. You all now become the curator of that place, of that experience, of the inside of Christianity you might say. I think Evelyn Underhill, for all of her guidance, inspiration, education, and direction toward the inner life, was profoundly clear that we did that, we went there, for really one reason, to emerge, again, to go out again, to go out changed, different, hopefully better, but to go. She was very keen on the need for the inside and the outside, balance.

That is what you all are being called to watch, to oversee, to steward. To share the Christian treasure with those who come inside, whether that be literally within these walls, or virtually on Zoom, for those who come into the circle

however we gather it, to see, hear, experience our Christian treasure. As she also said Christians go inside so that Eternity and Reality can be given to us on human terms.

That is so important, and yet, never were we meant to stay there. We get up again, after hopefully being emptied perhaps, and filled again hopefully, and sent back into the world, where the real sharing of Jesus' way occurs.

You, this night, what all these years of preparation have brought you to, you three are now going to be given the task of making that hope a reality locally, in whatever base camp you are asked to work in and oversee.

Underhill, in the same work, said this, "One constantly hears people commenting on Christianity from outside and missing the point every time. They are on the wrong side of the wall."

That reminded me of GK Chesterton, who we also celebrated this last week, who once quipped that it was not that Christianity was all that bad, it is just that no one has ever tried it yet. You try it most fully from the inside, which ironically then, changes the outside for you, or it should.

Now, there is no getting around just how hard it is for many, so many, to simply walk through those doors, to the inside. And I am talking literally now, literally to walk through those doors. That is so monumentally difficult.

We ourselves have not always made it easy. One tremendous gift of the pandemic was us being stretched and pretty much forced to do what we should have done long ago, go virtual, take ourselves outside these walls, to go the other direction out those doors and do what has only

been a nice set of words in the past, “meet people where they are”.

We like to say that because it sounds so catchy and cool, but we are not always very good at actually doing it. My favorite sarcastic vision of Episcopal evangelism is us walking out on a beach with an empty aquarium and setting it in the sand about 10 feet from shore, and actually believing we will have fish in it when we return from our Sunday brunch. Let me tell you, it ain't going to work.

I believe, and not only believe, I have seen it already with my own eyes, that some who finally showed up virtually, who took advantage of that great gift, really liked what they saw, what they heard, how they felt, and will now, finally walk through those doors, to the inside. I see it almost every Sunday right now, someone telling me, I visited this church virtually for the first time in this pandemic, and now I am standing inside it.

You three, are now called to set that up, make that happen, and help the rest of us learn it too. So, in honor of Evelyn Underhill I want to share the quote in full, from the Light of Christ. She writes:

You know how one goes to see a church which one is told it has magnificent windows —and seen from outside they all look alike – dull, thick, grubby. We probably say, “Well It is obvious there is good glass here but we cannot realize it.” Then we open the door and go inside-leave the outer world, enter the inner world-and the universal light floods through the windows and bathes us in their color and beauty and significance, shows us things of which we had never dreamed, a loveliness that lies beyond the fringe of speech. And so, in the same way we

cannot realize God and all our Lord's lovely meaning as a revelation of God and His eternal Truth and Beauty from outside. One constantly hears people commenting on Christianity from outside and missing the point every time. They are on the wrong side of the wall. How important then it is for us to be familiar with the inner vision. It is from within the place of prayer, recollection, worship and love, where the altar is, where the sacrifice is made, where we are all bound together in a life of communion and self-giving to God, that we fully and truly receive the revelation that is made through Christ. Then we see the different acts and stages of His life like a series of windows through which streams into our souls the pure light of God, mediated to us in a way that we can bear: Eternity and Reality given to us in human terms. To re-enter that Cathedral, receive a fresh gift from its inexhaustible beauty, see through those windows more and more of the light of God, that is the secret of meditation. Julian says at the end of her Revelations that what she received from her vision of Christ was “Light, Life, and Love”; everything was gathered in that; an energy to show us the Truth, quicken us to fresh vitality and fill us with adoring devotion. What a contrast to that stodgy, vague, twilit inner life! We come into the silence to get more Light, Life, and Love. We come to contemplate our Christian treasure from inside. (Evelyn Underhill, *The Light of 18 of 25 Christ* (London: Longman's, 1945) 74-75,91-92,27-28,28-29,82-83.

Gerry, Charissa, Malcolm, please stand and turn out to face the church.

We are gathered this night, in person, and virtually, inside and out, because you three heard

a call and answered it, and then you asked us to affirm it, and we have, all along the way. Tonight we come to affirm it again, and to share, the riches we have as followers of Christ, and to ask you to help lead that, to oversee the base camp, to mediate the inner view of Christianity so that many more might come to it. I want to say some things to you and ask some things of you.

First, we are not calling you to be perfect, so please stop trying to be. You will not attain it. Instead, as the ancient Didache said to those very first Christians, do these things if you can, and if you can't, then do the best you can. We are asking that of you, to do your best, and all three of you are here tonight because we have experienced that in all of you.

Please own and relish your humanness. We are not calling you to stand in as the Messiah. None of you seem delusional enough to believe you could be, but just in case, let me clear it up for you, no one, including me, is asking this of you. In fact, you will teach us more by revealing your vulnerabilities, your fears, your insecurities, your beloved humanness, than any piety you might teach us.

Please, please, do not, in the course of what we are asking of you this night, neglect those who love you in this life, most especially those who love you whether you have the collar or not, who remember you long before it, and who you love and need and cherish. Let us all be clear; we are not asking you to neglect them for this. I will be clear, we will slip up on that from time to time, seem to expect it, please gently, lovingly, but by all means do, tell us when we do that, remind whoever it is of this night, and of my words, even if it happens to be me you need to address. We are not asking you to neglect them, for this.

Please for the love of God, and for the future of our Church, please try to lay competition down. Your colleagues are not someone you need to beat at this. You are not in a contest with them to win. They are people you walk with in this. It is cliché but still very true, we are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful. Being faithful can be and often is also successful, but faithfulness comes first, not success.

Please occupy this new office, this new mantle we ask you to hold and carry, which you say you want to do on our behalf, do that gently. Don't hold onto this title, this office, this power in a way that does damage to the reason for it in the first place. It is not your possession. It is a gift given by the Church, for you to hold and to steward.

Finally, be authentically who you are. We called you because we loved who you authentically are. We did not call you to now become something or someone different. Be who you are. "You do you" as they say now, and if you do, you will be the greatest example to us, especially as you show us how to claim our authenticity and in that, to follow Jesus.

Please help all of us, and all those who come to us, to the inside, by commenting from that spot, by revealing the eternity and reality of God in human terms, by revealing the Christian treasures there, so that those that come inside or look inside see the beloved community, see, the community of Light, Life, and Love. Gerry, Charissa, Malcolm. Help us See.

To all three of you bless you and thank you. My beloved, I have offered these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.