

ASSOCIATION OF PAPAL ORDERS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Dinner, Thursday 5 October 2023

Reverend Monsignors, Canons, Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen – or, if I may more simply, dear friends: when John Gibbs originally invited me to join you on this occasion I accepted immediately. A few months later I caused John considerable disappointment and some alarm by having to re-arrange the date due to a pressing but far less agreeable commitment. That was last year.

When John renewed the invitation this year I was very grateful for his generosity and restored confidence – although I suspect it wasn't until I actually arrived from Birmingham this evening that he could fully relax.

I want to thank Mgr Vladimir Felzmann for his uplifting, inspiring and energetic homily at our Mass – its was, if I may say so, “vintage Vlad”. I had the great joy of working with Mgr Vlad some twenty years ago and he supported the development of the diocesan youth service and helped it to extend its reach into the East End of London.

As an Auxiliary Bishop I learned a great deal – not least under John's fiscal tutelage – and it has been invaluable in fulfilling my responsibilities in Birmingham. And much of what I learnt was thanks to the experience, insights and expertise of lay men and women exercising their baptismal calling.

Whenever you wear your insignia as Papal Knights and Dames it is a visible sign that the Church values greatly the lay apostolate and recognises its central place in her mission – just as the Synod taking place in Rome and the Synodal Pathway are inviting laity and clergy together to contribute to the Church's self-understanding and to shape her vision and planning.

In the year before my ordination as a priest in 1981 I served as a deacon in Weybridge, Surrey. The parishioners were delightful and very generous – and one of them, Miss Marie Walsh, used to leave a loaf of soda-bread for me, every week – in the pulpit.

I asked a few parishioners, including Marie, what advice they would give to a newly-ordained priest. Marie said: “Don't become one of those efficient types.” I was a bit perplexed until she explained: “Leave room for other people's gifts to shine.” She couldn't help adding: “I only bake bread – but it's the best bread in Weybridge.”

So, dear friends thank you for using your gifts to serve Our Lord and His Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis urges the Church to go out into the world. He says: “But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbours but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, those who cannot repay you.”

Through the Papal Orders of St Gregory and St Sylvester the Holy See recognises that you have used your professional skills, your time and energy to advance her mission in the world. Thank you for all this – and for your generous hospitality tonight.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham