

**St Michael's Mount Dinham, Exeter**

You may remember the radio show *Round Britain Quiz* in which contestants were asked what theme linked 4 or 5 apparently disconnected things. A local ecclesial or parish variant might be to ask for the common feature between: Tom Honey's golf clubs, the Bishop of Exeter's breakfast, the recent graffiti on the cathedral, David Beadle's PhD thesis and Richard Parker's coat. My challenge tonight is similar: can I make connections between ordination to priesthood, celebrating a first Mass, Fr Chris Durrant, and the feast of the Angels. All in seven minutes and I've used up one minute already on this introduction.

I want to home in straightaway on priestly ordination, and pass on to you the advice my godfather, who was a priest and a chaplain, gave me when I became a university chaplain here. He said, "Do less!" This was not an excuse for laziness on his part, and certainly not for you or for me. Rather, those two words in some ways focus on the essence of priesthood, which is all about relationships – growing, fostering, nurturing and challenging relationships. Firstly, priesthood is a relationship with God, and then bringing others into that relationship. It means we spend time with God and time with other people. It seems to be that this is the core of priestly ministry, our USP, what deep-down others expect of us: an awesome and frightening role.

Now there is a slight catch here. Others can be better at this than we are: better at holiness, better at prayer, better at meditation and contemplation; in fact better at almost everything we do, but we're the ones who've said Yes to all this as a public role, and that's what's unique.

It's difficult because we're tempted to do more. Now that you, Chris, are ordained priest, people will expect more activities, more busy-ness. These parishes will probably want more out of you (the diocese will certainly seem to want more out of you); yet in becoming ever more active, we're likely to destroy the very thing that people want most, what they crave in their innermost hearts: a relationship, an encounter with the Divine, which they are looking to us to enable. So Do less!

Others' relationship with God is helped by yours, so this is your road to discovery, through the sacraments and the Bible, inviting others to join you. It's slow and costly, but rich in reward.

The sacraments bring us to God, and bring God to us and others, in a most intimate way, in glory and in humility. So this first Mass is a wonderful occasion – and may I just say: "So far, so good." All those years ago when I celebrated my first Mass, I went completely blank at one point, and whispered loudly to the vicar "What comes next?" He told me, and we carried on.

I did wonder what vestments might be on show this evening. Fr Chris as an ordinand was known for his wonderful tanktops, knitted lovingly by his family. So I'd hoped for a golden knitted chasuble tonight. But I do have it on good authority that the crocheted monstrance is in the sacristy.

A final word about the Angels. It strikes me that the traditional roles attributed to the archangels are not bad guides to the priestly role and character: Michael as defender and protector, Gabriel as messenger, and Raphael as healer, bridge-builder and (since he took out of Tobit's eye what blinded him), the one who helps others to see more clearly. The myriads of countless angels who simply worship God are what we all aspire to; and today's reading from St John's Gospel which anchors the angels into a relationship with Jesus brings an additional important focus.

I was talking to a wise friend a little while ago about priestly ministry and parish work, and I said rather wearily: "Barry, you live and you learn, don't you." (It was an evening full of clichés.) And he said back to me: "No David, you live and then you live a bit more." Chris, may God go with you in your priesthood, and may you live, and live a little bit more. Amen