

AMDG

Homily for the First Vows of Clément, Ján, Samuel and Tim,

Saturday 6th September, 2025.

When I first saw the Gospel for today's Mass, I thought that those taking vows either deliberately chose a difficult passage for me on which to preach or it so happened to be the Gospel of the day ... I suspect it was a bit of both! It is a particularly difficult Gospel because it challenges us to make choices, to choose our priorities, our sense of what is most important in life and, as St Ignatius would say, the importance of making our choices because of the needs in the face of particular persons, places and times. So, here goes!

The story takes place on a Sabbath – ‘a day of rest’. But what does that mean – ‘a day of rest’? For the Scribes and Pharisees it meant ‘no work’. If you read further on, Jesus meets a man with a withered hand, also on the Sabbath, and the scribes and the pharisees ask themselves whether Jesus will heal, that is, work, on the Sabbath. For Jesus, the Sabbath has a different meaning. He asks; “Is it allowed to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil?” Jesus heals the man. In other words, for Jesus, ‘rest’ does not mean ‘not working’ but rather, re-creating. In English, there is a happy play on words in which re-creation can also mean recreation, that is, rest. God re-creates in recreation. There is the importance, then, Clément, Ján, Samuel and Tim, of recreation, of doing good, of helping to re-create, in response to the needs of people who you will encounter on this next step of your Jesuit journey.

Jesus then, to illustrate and defend his actions, quotes the passage from Scripture in which David goes into the Temple and gives the Bread of Presence to his hungry followers. Furthermore, if you read this passage in Mark's Gospel, you will discover that Jesus refers to this happening when Abiathar is the high priest whereas if you read

the passage in the first book of Samuel it is, in fact, Ahimilech, who is the high priest! What is going on here? Has Jesus got it wrong, or St Mark? In either case, why hasn't it been corrected? So, that's one question you can take with you to your biblical studies! When I asked Jim, our own resident biblical scholar, he remarked, "perhaps someone made a mistake"! Perhaps someone made a mistake. Perhaps it's good to be reminded today that we, too, can make mistakes.

What is agreed, though, by scholars regarding this passage is that David takes the bread of presence, he and his disciples break, share, eat and give thanks, pointing ahead to Jesus Himself who later, at the Last Supper, will take the bread, and will bless, break and share this Bread, the gift of Himself, the Real Presence, to those hungering for the food of Life. Today, you, too, Clément, Ján, Samuel and Tim, will receive from this altar, the Real Presence of our Lord, given for you as food for your journey and you, in your own turn, will have the choice to respond to this wonderful gift in deep gratitude by offering yourselves as a gift of reverence, service and praise.

If you feel unworthy to receive this gift then you can be encouraged and consoled by our first reading from today's Mass:

'you, who once were alienated ... He has now reconciled in His Body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him ... stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.' (First letter to the Colossians, 1: 21-23)

As we celebrate this gift of First Vows, there is another celebration taking place in Tallin, Estonia: the beatification of Archbishop Edouard Profittlich. He was a Jesuit and when in 1941 the Nazis took possession of Estonia, Edouard, being German in origin, had the choice of leaving the country. Following a long process of personal discernment and consultation with Rome, and after Pope Pius XII left the final decision in his hands, Eduard Profittlich decided that to

remain with his Catholics in that country at that time, was more important even than his own life. His life, too, would be taken, blessed, given and shared. On 8 February 1941, he informed his family in Germany of his decision. He wrote;

'I must say that, even though it took me several weeks to make this decision, I did not do so out of fear or trepidation, but with great joy. And when, in the end, it became clear that I had to stay, my joy was so great that I prayed the Te Deum with gratitude and joy... I would have liked to tell everyone how good God is to us when we give ourselves completely to Him; how happy we can be when we are willing to give everything – our freedom and our lives – to Christ.

I am sure that many people have prayed for me during this time, asking God to show me the right path and to grant me His grace generously. (...)

What the future holds, I don't know. No one can predict the course of events with certainty. But of one thing I am sure right now: God's will for me is that I remain here, and this makes me happy and I face the future with great hope. Whatever may happen, I know that God will be with me. So, everything will be all right.'

Simon Bishop SJ

Our Lady on Saturday,

6th September, 2025.

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