

Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley of St Andrews & Edinburgh
Installation of six new canons
14 December 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

My dear friends,

Welcome to the cathedral on the happy occasion of the installation of six new canons into our cathedral chapter. I'm very grateful to Provost McMullen, Canon Burke, and Fr McMorrin for all their help with the arrangements associated with today.

The twelve men you see in the stalls here are the most senior active members of our diocesan clergy. They represent a great body of applied wisdom and experience that, added up, represent nearly 400 years of active ministry in the diocese, and that in itself is something to be celebrated. They have been tested under "the burden and heat of the day" (cf. Mt 20:12), and here today, that constancy and dedication is being recognised in a modest way by all of us.

Most Catholics know and appreciate the title of "canon" as an honour, but not everyone understands its origins, or its present-day significance, and so today affords me an opportunity to say something of its significance in this Archdiocese.

The European cathedral churches of times gone by always attracted, and demanded, a great deal of attention. They often were, or were intended to be, the focal point of much of the activity of the diocese, especially as a touchstone for high standards in the preaching of the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments, and the training of the clergy.

We only need to look at some of the cities of rural England to see the importance their cathedral, the religious faith that built them, and the civic pride in which they were held. Thus, their importance to this day. They were centres of influence, and they often set an example of how things should be done, that was then willingly copied by smaller churches and even by other dioceses, farther off. The ancient Archdiocese of St Andrews herself took up the customs of places as far away as Lincoln and Salisbury because of the latter's cathedrals,

their chapters, and their prestige. And so, the Chapters of Canons were among the bodies that helped to set the standards that others wished to imitate: in the beauty of their worship, in their singing, their training of the future clergy, in good governance, and so on.

Gradually, the Canons became a body who were to be consulted by the bishop on all sorts of important matters affecting the life of the diocese. This changed, however, when the internal law of the church was modified in 1917 and again in 1983: the role of the Cathedral Chapter changed significantly, and Rome decided that their political and executive functions were to be attributed elsewhere. To give you a parallel example, think of Queen's Privy Council: it used to be the body of men closest to the monarch, and at the heart of decision making in the land. Nowadays, it remains a high honour because of its proximity to the monarch; but the day-to-day decision-making is made elsewhere.

Similarly, since the changes made by the Holy See to canon law over the last century, the Chapter has moved away from decision-making and executive roles. On the other hand, the presence of all of you here on this happy occasion tells us that it nevertheless remains a notable honour in the eyes of everyone, and one that we are all happy to celebrate as a sign of gratitude and recognition to our senior priests.

So, the duties of the Cathedral Chapter are fewer than in times past, but the honour accorded the canons remains. That does not mean, however, that there are no more challenges left to them. There is still plenty to be done, and as Ezekiel points out in slightly different words (cf. Ez 18:21-29), their constancy in living and proclaiming the gospel will always be something that will be tested and refined during their service in the active ministry.

Nevertheless, in the meantime, on behalf of you all, I would like to congratulate them all warmly on reaching this milestone, and we wish them continued health, consolation, and blessing in their service of the Lord. Amen.