

DIACONATE ORDINATION: CRAIG ABURN AND HUGH PARRY

We're happy today to ordain as deacons Craig Aburn and Hugh Parry. For both of them, for their wives Margaret and Nicki, their children and families, today is the culmination of a long vocational journey plus five years of formation at Maryvale and Oscott. I remember in 1983 my own diaconate at Palazzola, the English College villa near Rome. Afterwards, I came home for the summer break full of enthusiasm, and rolled up for midday Mass in my parish in Altrincham, offering to serve as deacon. The priest looked completely nonplussed: *What's a deacon?* he asked. He wouldn't allow me to read the Gospel or give HC, though he did allow me to sit with the altar servers. I think today we're much more familiar with deacons and our Diocese of Portsmouth is blessed with over 40 deacons. They serve in whatever way the Bishop decides, but most assist priests in their home or neighbouring parishes.

Let's stay with this. For in a moment, Craig and Hugh, you'll be asked whether you are willing to be ordained, whether you will lovingly serve the Church, whether you will faithfully teach the Catholic Faith, whether you will eagerly promise to be men of prayer and whether you will zealously model your life on Jesus. A deacon sacramentally re-presents Christ the Servant, as a minister of the altar, a minister of the Word and a minister of charity caring especially for the poor and needy. This is why every day you must spend time with Jesus Himself, adoring Him in the Eucharist, imbibing from the Scriptures and the *Catechism* the Truth He has taught us, and selflessly seeking to model your life-style on His. But in a moment, you will also be asked to undertake the promise of obedience. The secular culture in which we live finds this alien: it focuses on the individual and what s/he thinks and chooses, freedom *from* rather than freedom *for*. But for Christians, obedience, from *ob-audire* to listen to, means being *Christ-centred* not *self-centred*. It means putting Christ first, living under Him. It means interpreting every day the situation I find myself in and determining what Christ and His Church would want me to do. Obedience will take us beyond our comfort-zones. You'll often wear yourself out, like Jesus, seemingly in vain. In fact, it will cost you, like Him, everything.

*When he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.* Hugh and Craig, we're very grateful for what you are doing today. We're proud of you. We thank you and we thank your wives and families for your great generosity in becoming deacons, servants of Christ and His Church. There is, though, one request I'd like to make. We live today as you know in a context in which there are not only huge numbers of non-practising Catholics, almost 9 out of every 10, but

in which there are also huge numbers of unchurched people in our society, almost 19 out of every 20. Since Christ is the only way to salvation and happiness, the task of mission and evangelisation is urgent. So I ask you: please commit yourselves wholeheartedly to this. Don't become timid, inward-looking ecclesiastics, chaplains to the parish community. Be outward-looking. Be like Christ in the Gospel, *touring through all the towns and villages*, men who seek out those who are adrift. In a word, be deacons of the new evangelisation, full of ardour spreading the Gospel. In this Mass, in which we thank the *Lord of the Harvest* for granting us new *labourers for his harvest*, this is our prayer for you and your families. May Mary Immaculate and St. Edmund of Abingdon inspire you and help you.