

LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

The Lord has done marvels for me. Holy is his name. Today, with Mary we cry *Magnificat!* as we joyfully celebrate this Mass in which our brother Gary May is to be ordained to the sacred diaconate. We pray for you Gary, for Jackie your dear wife, for your children Chris, Rebecca and Eleanor, for all your family and friends from near and far, and for all your colleagues from work. After a long journey of discernment, prayer and formation, you've at last reached this happy day, a happy day too for your parish in Ryde, for our Diocese, and for me your Bishop. As you know, the Diocese of Portsmouth is big. 3M people live in the area it covers, of which over 200,000 are Catholics. We have just 100 priests and 40 deacons, but today, in you, the Lord is giving us another pair of hands, to serve Him, not least in the poor and needy!

The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone. It's wonderful you are being ordained in the week after the Epiphany, when we've been thinking of the Magi and their long journey, following a star, to bring gifts of incense, myrrh and gold to the Infant Jesus. These gifts are rich in meaning: incense for a priest, myrrh for a prophet's burial, gold for a king. Jesus Christ is humanity's priest, teacher and shepherd. He is the Light of the world, and He is found in Bethlehem, a place-name in Hebrew that means 'The House of Bread.' Gary, as you know, people these days are incredibly busy, working hard with lots to worry about. But, we need to get across to them the fantastic Good News, that there is a God and He is our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is the Way to human happiness. He is the Truth about being human. He is the Life that lasts forever. And we can find Him in the House of Bread, His Church.

I'm sure people ask you: What on earth is a deacon? Like a priest and a bishop, a deacon is an official minister of the Church, who shares sacramentally in Christ's three-fold ministry of sanctifying, teaching and shepherding. Most deacons help in parishes, serving the priest and serving the community, often in very practical ways. Like Christ Himself, Whom St. Paul speaks of in 2ndR, this requires complete self-sacrifice. No wonder in Tradition, deacons are associated at Mass with ministering the Chalice, the Precious Blood of the Lord. This symbolises perfectly your vocation: like Jesus, to lay down your life for the service of others. For above all, a deacon is a minister of charity, and charity can mean anything from the personal care of someone in need, to teaching the Catechism and locking up the parish centre.

I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me. Gary May, today we commend you to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin, who gave herself totally to the service of Christ her Son. Mary did the will of God perfectly and in so doing shows us the secret of human happiness: that it's in giving we receive. This is why today we wish you great joy as an ordained minister of Christ, a *diakonos*, a servant. May you help many people to find in Jesus, Priest, Teacher and Shepherd, the happiness for which their hearts long. Indeed, in this Mass, we pray that the Lord will grant you many years of service in the House of Bread. And at the last, may you be found worthy to hear from He Who is the Light of the World, those thrilling words: *Well done, good and faithful servant: come and enter the happiness of your Lord!*