

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Gifts of Deacons

In less than a fortnight our parish hopes to take a great leap forward, with the ordination of the first Deacon for the City of Nottingham. Anthony has been, in many ways, a long time on the road to Major Orders, but sometimes God keeps the best things until last, as today's Gospel reveals.

What Is A Deacon?

The Greek word *diakonos* means one who serves. The Church has from the earliest known the need for service, like any other community; but we don't find the meaning of the diaconate by looking at human needs, but by looking at God. The reason why we put a Deacon into vestments rather than overalls is that his life is modelled on the life of *Christ the Servant*. So the first answer to the question "what is a Deacon?" is: *one who is like Christ in serving people*.

Three Orders

There are three Holy Orders in the Church. The fulness of priesthood is exercised by the Bishop, as Head of the Church in the Nottingham Diocese. All the other ordained people depend on him; he gives a share in his tasks to assistants – the priests. This *shared* priesthood is always exercised because of their communion with the Bishop, and through him with all the other Bishops. A priest without that relationship with a Bishop loses the ground of exercising his ministry. Finally, the Order of Deacons completes the triad, and again it is through relating to the Bishop (rather than the Parish Priest!) that a Deacon has authority to lead, guide, and co-ordinate the work and service of the Church in the Diocese.

Outward Signs

The Deacon takes a new place in the liturgy, vested in alb, stole (worn diagonally), and the special diaconal outer vestment, the dalmatic. You can tell several things about him from the rôle he has in the Mass. Firstly, he *always* has the right to proclaim the Gospel if he is taking part in the Mass (you will notice that it is the deacon who does this, even at the Pope's liturgy). This means that he is a minister of the Word, which enables him to preach as well; like a priest's, a deacon's preaching forms part of the Liturgy of the Word. A Deacon, secondly, prepares the gifts for the Eucharist, showing that he has a ministry of the Altar; he has a special rôle in the preparation of liturgy, and the organization of its practical needs.

Thirdly, he will give directions to the congregation, and dismiss them at the end of Mass.

Being Ordained

Most candidates for the diaconate will have been well-known for their contribution to parish life as laymen. Some priests ask why they should "disturb" such good work by turning their best laymen into clergy. The first answer is to do with vocation: it is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, and who has inspired the restoration, by the Pope in the Ecumenical Council, of the ancient Order of Deacon in our time. It is no wonder if many good people should feel the call to serve in this way. Secondly, the Deacon no longer operates merely as a good parishioner: he takes a share in *leading others* to contribute and work for the Gospel. Anthony has been a hardworking musician and has given us a great deal in that field: as a Deacon he will be called to take more responsibility for the whole liturgical life of the parish. In his preaching he will greatly bless the parish by giving us a second voice, a second viewpoint; and here it deserves to be said that the fact that our Deacons are *married* changes the whole face of the Diocesan Clergy. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is at work in this. The exact way in which God will use our new Deacons is yet to be revealed. But even on the limited basis of our experience so far, it is clear to me that we are living in a time of new graces.
Fr Philip