

A Night to Remember

I was looking forward to Jim's ordination. I was delighted that such an energetic 26 year old, with zeal for the gospel, should be heading for priesthood. In fact I was quietly amazed; amazed that, in a church where the operative phrase is 'vocations crisis', such a remarkable young man had come forth without hesitation or drama; a 'normal young bloke' with a solid and prayerful commitment to serving God and church.

So it was with pleasure that I turned up to the Cathedral that night to celebrate his ordination to diaconate. And yet, I must admit, I was prepared for an 'old' style of church celebration. The kind where the personality of the candidate gets buried under layers of ecclesiastical protocol and where the people in the pews feel they are mere spectators to what's happening 'up there' on the sanctuary. The truth is, I expected to be at least a little bit bored.

Now obviously I did not know Jim well enough. If I did I would not have had a surprised reaction upon entering the church that evening: 'Wow. This place is full of young people!' A palpable buzz of youthful anticipation filled the air. It was the kind of enthusiastic expectation that precedes 'a good night out', only here it was centred upon the ordination of one of their peers. Instantly I shed ten years.

And the music. What is it

about young people and music? It is like an extension of their beings. It is one of the great assets of their culture. Pulsing with talent and life they led the congregation in song, praising God and lifting up their brother with an unambiguous 'Yes!' to his commitment, a 'Yes' that resounded in thunderous applause.

A leader from the parish where Jim had been living and working gave testimony to his readiness for ordination. She spoke with the quiet authority of one who knew first-hand the vitality of Jim's faith. To the community this man was known as a Christ-bearer.

A healthy ecumenical flavour laced the celebration. One of the readers was a young man recently baptised in the Baptist church (displaying an even more recent ring in his pierced eyebrow!) A leader from an evangelical church vested Jim in his stole. This was not 'forced' or 'token' ecumenism. This was true ecumenism—a natural expression of the fact that Jim's path to priesthood had been strongly influenced by the faith of people from other Christian churches. As a teenager Jim discovered the power of Christian music outside the structures of the Catholic church and had responded by bringing this gift to his local Catholic community. Over the years, talents were shared and friendships forged. Jim had been a bridge-builder from the age of 16 and the fruits were evident this night.

From beginning to end, Jim's ordination to the diaconate was the kind of celebration that overturns expectations and rekindles the romance of conversion. It was, dare I say, one of 'the signs of our times' calling for renewed confidence in our church and a warning never to limit the power of the Spirit by our own gloomy predictions. I kept thinking: 'What a brilliant vocations advertisement.' Forget the billboards and leaflets saying 'Ever thought about becoming a priest?' If you want to get some young people thinking about a church vocation, just invite them to Jim's ordination to priesthood! If his diaconate celebration is any indication, his ordination to priesthood will be a night to remember. •

