DIACONAL ORDINATION OF REV. MICHAEL DOYLE
ST. DAVID'S CATHEDRAL  CARDIFF    21 DECEMBER 2013
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

In two weeks time, we will begin celebrating the centenary of the birth  of one the most famous sons of Wales  -  the poet Dylan Thomas. It was he who wrote:

Do not go gently into that good night.
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

The people of post industrial Wales have a great many things to rage about. Their Non - Conformist tradition will have made them familiar with the language and poetry of the prophets, not least  to the prophet Zephaniah. Like the other prophets of 600 years before Christ, Zephaniah preached boldly against the religious and moral corruption of the people of Israel. Their worship of false gods, even in the Temple, and their alliances with foreign poweres, were symptomatic of their loss of faith in the true God. No wonder Zephaniah warned: "I shall raise my hand against Judah, against all who live in Jerusalem, and from this place I will wipe out the remnants of Baal". (Zeph. 1:4-5)

" Rage, rage against the dying of the light" .

But even in the midst of all that darkness, the prophet can still promise a glimmer of hope. We heard it today. "Rejoice with all your heart….The Lord has repealed your sentence. He will exult over you. He will renew you by his love" (Zeph. 3:14) . Darkness and light. Failure and faith. Sadness and joy. All part of the Advent hope and expectation in which and  by which we followers of Jesus live. This is also  the pattern and the framework of the life of the one who  has caught a glimpse of God's light and love shine into his own life. Like the prophets, he is being called to minister to God's people in every circumstance of life.He  is called to walk by the light of understanding,integrity and truth himself. He is to lead others to the light which has guided his journey of faith. He has not just to preach to them about God's presence in good times, in bad times too.  He has to be a sign of that presence in word and in action, in silence and in prayer,waiting and hoping and trusting that God can always be served no matter what the circumstances.

None of us who are called to lead and to serve in this way can do this on our own – even if we think we can. We need to be bound together, ordained, ordered, directed and supported by the grace this sacrament gives. That is why Michael has been called "..to the order of deacons". Not a privatised endeavour, but part of the body which has the good of the whole Church, and this local Church of the  Diocese of Cardiff, as its focus. That is one reason why he will be clothed in the vestments of a deacon – to remind him that he is not acting on his own authority but by the authority of Christ and his Church. That is why he will be given the Book of the Gospels and told:

Receive the Gospel of Christ,
Whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read
Teach what you believe,
And practice what you teach.

Yet again, Michael,  the Advent readings will give you a pattern of that reading and hearing, of believing and teaching. We say that Mary conceived Jesus in her heart before conceiving him in her womb. Her attentive presence was a source of joy to Him whom she carried.She  in turn became a living example and a cause of joy to others. "The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy". (Luke 1:43) In bringing Jesus to those in need, whether sacramentally or by your own presence, our new deacon  will be honoured by the welcome people give him into their homes and into their lives. He, like all of us who have the privilege of ministering to God's people, will know that we walk on holy ground when they allow us privileged access to their lives.

The true prophet abandons himself to the dramatic adventure of serving God in his people. The Deacon must learn to do the same.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late,they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.