

Sunday, 3rd May 2026
Homily for the Vigil for Fr David Taylor
Fr David Ranson

There is something quietly sacred that happens at a Vigil. We gather in the presence of one another, in the presence of memory, and in the presence of God, and we begin to listen again to a life.

Indeed, one of the most extraordinary experiences at a time such as this is hearing the story of the one whose life we celebrate. It is like standing for a moment at the window of their life. We glimpse something of its radical uniqueness, its relationships, its turning points, its joys and burden, and we realise that the world is not quite the same because this life has been lived. How much more is this true tonight, as we keep vigil for Fr David Taylor – priest, brother, friend, pastor – whose life has been so deeply interwoven with so many of us.

David was born in Melbourne on 25 August 1950, the eldest of six children of Gilbert and Marie. His early years led him from St John the Baptist at Freshwater to St Augustine's College, Brookvale. Even in those early years there was a stirring, a sense of call. He began studies with the Augustinians in Brisbane, though with a humility and honesty that would mark his whole life, he stepped back when he sensed he was not yet ready. Instead, he entered deeply into the life of the world. He studied social work at the University of Sydney and went on to serve at the Concord Repatriation Hospital, working in community, medical and psychiatric care. These were not just professional experiences; they were formative. They placed him close to the fragility of the human person, close to suffering, close to the quiet courage of those who struggle.

And perhaps it was here, both through his work and through his own inner journey, that something essential in David's priesthood was being shaped. For David knew in his own life the reality of anxiety and depression. This was not incidental to who he was; it was part of his lived experience. Yet it did not diminish him. In a mysterious way, it became the very place through which grace worked most powerfully in him. Because of this, David never ministered to people from a distance. He understood something of the inner landscape of the human heart, the places of uncertainty, of heaviness, of searching. And so, when he spoke of God's love, when he offered the Sacraments, when he simply listened, there was an authenticity, a gentleness, and a compassion that people recognised immediately. He knew what it was to need grace and so he became a remarkably effective minister of that grace for others.

In 1984, on retreat at Harbord, the call to priesthood returned, quietly but insistently. And this

time, David said yes. He entered the seminary at Manly and was ordained on 7 December 1991 by Bishop Patrick Murphy at Corpus Christi Cathedral, St Ives. From that moment, his life was given in service: Mona Vale, Gosford, Pennant Hills, Forestville–Davidson, and then, for many years, Manly–Freshwater. He served also as Dean of the Northern Beaches and gave generously of himself in the life of the diocese. But beyond the appointments and responsibilities, what remains most deeply is the manner of his presence: steady, thoughtful, compassionate, attentive. A priest who did not need to draw attention to himself, because he was attentive to others.

And yet, even as we recall all of this tonight, we are aware of something more. For no eulogy, no collection of memories, no matter how heartfelt, can ever fully capture a person. Each of us carries an irreducible mystery. We are more than what others see of us; more even than what we understand of ourselves. There is always something in us that resists definition. This points us to one of the deepest human questions: can I ever be truly known?

It is a question that sits quietly at the heart of every life, and perhaps especially in a life like David's, where the inner world could at times be marked by struggle. To be known not partially, not imperfectly, but completely – to be received as we truly are, this is the deepest hunger of the human heart. Our Christian faith speaks directly into that longing. It tells us that our life is not something we possess, but something we receive. That each of us is called into being by an infinite, personal love, a love that knows us more deeply than we know ourselves, and that gently calls us into the fullness of who we are meant to be.

We glimpse this along the way, in moments – moments of clarity, of connection, of peace. But we never quite grasp it fully. Until, perhaps, this moment.

In the Gospel proclaimed in these Easter days, we hear of Mary Magdalene standing at the tomb, lost in grief, unable to recognise the risen Christ, until he speaks her name: “Mary.” And in that moment, everything changes. In being known, she comes to know. In hearing her name, she becomes fully herself. This is the quiet hope that holds us tonight.

That now, beyond the struggles, beyond the limitations, beyond even the partial knowing of this life, David hears his name spoken in its fullness. Not as we knew him only, but as he has always been known.

And in that moment, all that he sought, all that he carried, all that he longed for, is gathered into a deeper truth: that he is known, completely and lovingly, in God. This is not the erasing of his life, but its fulfilment. Not the loss of identity, but its completion.

And so we commend Fr David Taylor into that mystery, not as one lost to us, but as one who has now come home to the One who has always known him, always loved him, and now calls him by name.