



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF THE DEACONS OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Sunday, 20 June 2010

(Video)

Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Very Dear Ordinands,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As Bishop of this Diocese I am particularly glad to welcome 14 new Priests into the "presbyterium" of Rome. Together with the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops and all the Priests, I thank the Lord for the gift of these new pastors of the People of God. I would like to address a special greeting to you, beloved ordinands: today you are the centre of attention of the People of God, symbolically represented by the people who fill this Vatican Basilica. They fill it with their prayers and their singing, with their sincere and deep affection, their authentic emotion, their human and spiritual joy. Among this People of God a special place is reserved for your parents and relatives, your friends and companions, the Superiors and teachers at your Seminaries, the various parish communities and the different sectors of the Church from which you come and which have accompanied you on your journey, as well as those to whom you have already offered your pastoral service. Nor should we forget the unique closeness, at this moment, of many other people, humble and simple but great before God such as, for example, the cloistered women religious, the children, the sick and the infirm. They accompany you with the very precious gift of their prayers, their innocence and their suffering.

Thus today it is the whole Church of Rome which is giving thanks and praying for you, which puts such great trust and hope in your future, which expects abundant fruits of holiness and good from your priestly ministry. Yes, the Church relies on you, she relies very heavily on you! The Church needs each one of you, aware as she is of the gifts that God offers you and, at the same time, of the absolute need in every person's heart to encounter Christ, the one and universal Saviour of the world, to receive from him new and eternal life, true freedom and full joy. We therefore feel we are all invited to enter the "mystery", the event of grace that is being brought about in your hearts with Ordination to the priesthood, letting ourselves be illuminated by the Word of God that has been proclaimed.

The Gospel we have heard presents to us an important moment in Jesus' journey, the moment when he asks his disciples what people think of him and their own opinion of him. Peter answers on behalf of the Twelve with a profession of faith substantially different from the people's opinion of Jesus; in fact he says: You are the Christ of God (cf. Lk 9: 20). What is the origin of this act of faith? If we go to the beginning of the Gospel passage, we note that Peter's profession is linked to a moment of Prayer: "as he [Jesus] was praying alone the disciples were with him", St Luke says (9: 18). In other words the disciples become involved in Jesus' absolutely unique being and speaking with the Father. And so it is that they are granted to see the Teacher in his intimate condition as Son, they are granted to see what the others do not see; from "being with him", from "being with him" in prayer, derives a knowledge that goes beyond the people's opinion to reach the profound identity of Jesus, to reach the truth. Here we are given a very precise instruction for the priest's life and mission: he is called to rediscover in prayer the ever new face of his Lord and the most authentic content of his mission. Only those who have a profound relationship with the Lord are grasped by him, can take him to others, can be sent out. "Abiding with him" must always accompany the exercise of the priestly ministry. It must be its central part, even and above all in difficult moments when it seems that the "things that need doing" should have priority, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we must always "abide with him".

I would like to underline a second element of today's Gospel. Immediately after Peter's profession, Jesus announces his Passion and Resurrection and follows this announcement with a teaching concerning the journey of the disciples, which means following him, the Crucified One, and following him on the Way of the Cross. And he then adds with paradoxical words that being a disciple means "losing his life", but in order to save himself fully (cf. Lk 9: 22-24). What does this mean for every Christian, but what does it mean for a priest in particular? Discipleship; yet we can safely say: the priesthood can never be a means of achieving security in life or of acquiring a position in society. Anyone who aspires to the priesthood to enhance his own prestige and power has misunderstood the meaning of this ministry at its root. Anyone who wishes above all to achieve an ambition of his own, to attain success for himself will always be a slave to himself and to public opinion. In order to be esteemed, he must flatter, he must say what people want to hear; he will have to adapt to changing fashions and opinions and will thus deprive himself of the vital relationship with truth, reducing himself to condemning tomorrow what he had praised today. A

man who plans his life in this manner, a priest who sees his ministry in these terms does not truly love God and others but only himself and, paradoxically, ends by losing himself. The priesthood let us always remember is based on having the courage to say "yes" to another will, in the awareness that we are growing every day, that precisely by conforming to God's will, by "immersing ourselves" in this will, not only will our own originality not be obliterated, but on the contrary, we will penetrate ever more deeply into the truth of our being and our ministry.

Dear Ordinands, I would like to propose for your reflection a third thought, closely linked to what I have just explained: Jesus' invitation to "lose [yourself]", to take up your cross, recalls the mystery we are celebrating: the Eucharist. Today, with the sacrament of Orders, you are granted to preside over the Eucharist! To you is entrusted the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, to you is entrusted his Body given and his Blood poured out. Of course, on the Cross Jesus offers his sacrifice, his gift of humble and total love to the Church his Bride. It is on that wood that the grain of wheat which the Father let fall on the field of the world dies in order to become a ripe fruit, a giver of life. However, in God's plan, Christ's gift of himself is made present in the Eucharist through that *potestas sacra*, which the sacrament of Orders confers upon you priests. When we celebrate Holy Mass we hold in our hands the Bread of Heaven, the Bread of God, which is Christ, the grain that breaks open in order to increase and to become the true food of life for the world. It is something that cannot but fill you with deep wonder, lively joy and immense gratitude: love and the gift of the Crucified and Glorious Christ now pass through your hands, your voice, your heart! It is an ever new experience of wonder to see that the Lord brings about this mystery of his Presence in my hands, in my voice!

So how can we fail to pray the Lord to give you an ever alert and enthusiastic awareness of this gift which is placed at the centre of your being as priests! And to give you the grace of being able to experience in depth the whole beauty and power of this presbyteral service of yours and, at the same time, the grace of being able to live this ministry with consistency and generosity, every day. The grace of the priesthood, which will shortly be given to you, will associate you closely, indeed structurally, with the Eucharist. This is why it will connect you in the depths of your hearts with the sentiments of Jesus who loves to the very end, to the total gift of himself, to the point of his becoming Bread multiplied for the sacred banquet of unity and communion. This is the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, destined to set your heart on fire with the very love of the Lord Jesus. It is an outpouring which, while communicating the absolutely free nature of the gift, sculpts in your being an indelible law the new law, a law that impels you to insert and make flourish anew, in the material context of the attitudes and actions of your every day life, the same love that prompted the self-giving of the Crucified Christ. Let us listen once again to the Apostle Paul's voice, indeed in this voice we recognize the powerful voice of the Holy Spirit: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3: 27). Already in Baptism, and now by virtue of the sacrament of Orders, you have put on Christ. May care for the Eucharistic celebration always be accompanied by commitment to a Eucharistic life, namely, a life lived in obedience to one great law, that of love which is given without reserve and serves with humility, a life that the grace of the Holy Spirit renders ever closer to the life of Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, Servant of God

and of humankind.

Dear friends, the path that today's Gospel points out to us is the path of your spirituality and of your pastoral action, of its efficacy and effectiveness, even in the most demanding and arid situations. Furthermore, this is the reliable way to finding true joy. May Mary, the Servant of the Lord who conformed her will to that of God, who brought forth Christ, giving him to the world, who followed the Son even to the foot of the Cross in the supreme act of love, accompany you every day of your life and of your ministry. Thanks to the affection of this tender and strong Mother, you will be able to be joyously faithful to the orders that as priests are being conferred on you today: to conform yourselves to Christ the Priest, who was able to obey the Father's will and to love man to the very end.

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