



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO KOREA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA,

SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THAILAND

(MAY 2-11, 1984) MASS AT SAMPRAN WITH DIACONAL ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Seminary of Sampran (Thailand)

Friday, 11 May 1984

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. We are here this afternoon to celebrate a beautiful occasion. Twenty-three young men, called by God at Baptism and chosen in a special way for service in his Church, are being ordained to *the Priesthood of Jesus Christ*. This is an important moment for the entire Catholic Church, both of this generation and of all times. It is a further manifestation of God's love for his people; the Good Shepherd never leaves his flock untended. At the same time, this ceremony has particular meaning for the Church in Thailand; it is a sign of *spiritual maturity*. This ordination represents the time of harvest, the joyful moment when the seeds of a divine vocation, sown by God and nurtured by families and teachers, bear fruit in the lives of the individual young men who stand before us today and who ask me, acting in the name of Christ and his Church, to confer upon them the sacramental grace of the Priesthood.

When I look around and see this Minor Seminary of the Archdiocese, and a little farther away the Major Seminary which is dedicated to Christ the Light of the World; when I think of the Minor Seminaries in nearly all the Dioceses of Thailand, as well as the Intermediate Seminary established by the Bishops; when I reflect on all the religious communities that rely on the Major Seminary for the training of their own candidates - when I see all these marvellous works, I can only think back on the humble beginnings of the first College at Ayudhaya in 1666. *I praise and thank God* for the many gifts he has bestowed upon you, especially through the foresight of your Bishops.

Here is *the heart of the Church in Thailand*, not only of the Archdiocese of Bangkok but of each local Church. Here you train, through prayer and study, the future priests of your country and you develop within them the sound traditions which will enable them to speak to the hearts of the Thai people, so that they in turn may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ "in the breaking of the bread" (*Luc. 24, 35*).

2. As co-workers with their Bishops and sharers in the ministry of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King, these twenty-three young men will exercise the priestly office in the Church. By their sacramental ordination they will be anointed in the Holy Spirit, signed with a special character, and so will be *configured to Christ* in such a way that they will be able to act in his name and in his person.

In describing to us features of the Messiah, the Prophet Isaiah presents to us at the same time an image of the priest who is configured to Christ: "Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations" (*Is. 42, 1*). In bringing forth justice, Christ took on the characteristics of the Servant of Israel, and he was called upon to suffer and to *sacrifice himself* for the redemption of humanity.

The First Letter of Saint Peter is even more explicit in expressing the sacrificial dimension of Christ's redeeming work: Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (*1 Petr. 2, 24*). Here we see the extent of Christ's self-sacrifice: he suffered death to free us from our sins so that we might know the newness of life in God.

3. The priest of the New Testament finds *his identity in the person and mission of Christ*. He continues to make visible Christ's saving action. His consecration represents Christ's total self-emptying. This priest is called to proclaim the Good News of salvation, to gather together and lead the community of believers, and to serve as a *minister of the sacred mysteries*. In the name of the Redeemer the priest reconciles sinners with God and with the Church in the Sacrament of Penance. By celebrating the Eucharist, the priest proclaims the Lord's death and Resurrection in which Jesus himself confirms the new covenant in his blood.

In all of this, Christ is, as Saint Peter says, "the Shepherd and Guardian" of our souls (*Cf. 1 Petr. 2 25*). He is indeed the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him (*Cf. Io. 10, 11-14*).

Through sacramental ordination, the priest shares in a special way in the pastoral care of Christ for his Church. He does it in line with the mission of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench . . . he will not fail or be discouraged" (*Cf. Is. 42, 3-4*). With patience and humility he fulfils the function of Christ as Pastor and Head, exercising a spiritual power that is given to him for the purpose of building up Christ's

Body. By humbly placing himself at the service of those entrusted to his care, the priest is guided in all things by the will of him who wished none to be lost and all to be saved (Cf. *Io.* 10, 16)

4. My dear Deacons, young men about to be ordained to the Priesthood: Yours is a truly *sublime vocation*, endowed with a dignity that Christ himself has given it. It is a special gift of God, to be used for the good of the Church and *the salvation of the world*. Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah as he speaks of such a vocation: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" (*Is.* 42, 6).

The Lord has taken you by the hand. He calls you by name. He gives you as a *covenant* to the people and a *light to the nations*. He chooses you to offer, in the person of Christ, the new covenant established in his Blood, and to spread the light of Christ's saving message throughout the world.

Be faithful to this vocation. Be generous in your service. Follow the example of Christ, who came to serve and not be served. Accept as a special challenge the call to preach the Gospel to the people of your native land. Encourage and strengthen those who have already heard Christ's message, and proclaim it boldly and perseveringly to those who have not yet come to believe. Your vocation requires of you a *missionary spirit*.

As priests in the Church, which is the universal sacrament of salvation, you are called to offer yourselves as a ransom for all, to follow in the footsteps of him who offered himself freely so that all might be set free. This means that you must remain permanently *united with Christ through prayer*, sacrifice, suffering and obedience to his will. It demands a generosity of spirit that will lead you to thank God each day for the gift of celibacy, which is both a sign of pastoral love and an incentive to it.

As you meditate on the need for the Church's mission of salvation to be extended "to the ends of the earth" (*Act.* 1, 8), I also know that you will strive to respond whole-heartedly to the invitation to exercise your ministry in Dioceses which are hampered by a shortage of vocations.

Dear brothers and sons, be constant in your love for Christ and his Church. As priests you will collaborate with Christ the Saviour; you are *men of God's pardon and mercy*. Never fail to proclaim that mercy to those who need it most: the poor, the sick, the dying, the broken-hearted, and those who are trapped in sin. And show God's mercy to your brother priests who, in moments of disappointment and hardship, may turn to you for encouragement and fraternal support. In a word, in everything you do, be another Christ to those whom you meet.

5. Dearly beloved people of Thailand, my brothers and sisters in Christ, these young men are about to be marked with the sign of Christ's priestly office in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. *Pray*

for them: for their zeal and their personal happiness and for their perseverance as holy priests of Jesus Christ. Pray too for those who continue to make sacrifices so that other young men may hear the Lord's voice and follow in his footsteps. Pray for good and numerous vocations to the priesthood, to the sisterhood and to the brotherhood. Invite Jesus to enter your homes, your schools, your youth movements, so that many young people may accept Christ's call to leave everything and follow him.

In this hour of joy and thanksgiving *let us raise our hearts to Jesus Christ*, the Good Shepherd, the High Priest of our salvation. It is he who has given the ministry of the Priesthood to his Church. It is he, Jesus Christ, who leads us to his Father, and who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Act of entrustment to Mary

At the end of this Sacred Liturgy, in this moment of special grace, our hearts turn with great gratitude and joy to the holy Mother of God:

O Blessed Virgin Mary, I thank you for your maternal love for *all your dear sons and daughters in Thailand*. As Pastor of the universal Church, I entrust them all to your Immaculate Heart, asking you to watch over them always and to guide them in the ways of holiness and peace.

O Mary, Mother of priests, with filial devotion I entrust to you these *newly ordained priests*, whom your Son has called to be his friends and whom he is sending forth to proclaim the Good News of the Redemption. Keep them always faithful in generous service to God's people. Draw them ever closer to your own Pure Heart and to the Sacred Heart of your Son.

O Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, at every step of human history you are near to the People of God, supporting them with your prayers and giving them courage to witness to the truth of the Gospel. Intercede today for *all the clergy, religious and laity* of Thailand, that they may be strong in faith and hope, and that they may persevere in the love of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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