



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF THE ROMAN SEMINARY

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Vatican Gardens

Sunday, 15 June 1997

1. "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground" (Mk 4:26). The name seminary refers to these words of Christ. The Latin word *seminarium* comes from *semen*, seed. Jesus says that the seed scattered upon the ground will sprout and grow whether man watches or sleeps: it sprouts and grows by night and day. "The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (Mk 4:28).

The analogy with the priestly vocation is self-evident. It is like God's seed, scattered in human souls, which grows with its own force. But the seed, in order to grow, must be cared for. It is man who must sow; and it is man again who must watch over the seed's growth. It is necessary to prevent harmful forces, evil persons or natural disasters from destroying the tender shoots that are growing. And when they have reached maturity, man must put his hand to the sickle, as Christ says, because the field is ready for the harvest (cf. Mk 4:29).

On another occasion Jesus observes: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38). These words also refer to the seminary, the place where labourers are trained for the great harvest of God's kingdom, which extends to all countries and continents. It is good that today, at the end of the seminary's academic year, we listen once again to Christ's parable.

2. The Gospel which has just been proclaimed contains another comparison, important for you who have come to the end of the year's work at the seminary. Christ asks: "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?" (Mk 4:30). And he answers: "It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds

on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mk 4:31-32). These words refer to the Book of Ezekiel, from which the first reading is taken. The two texts speak of the same thing: the growth of God's kingdom in the history of the world. According to another analogy, they also speak of the growth of a priestly vocation in every young soul. This is precisely the seminary's task. At the end of the seminary year, we have the opportunity to look at the great work carried out during these months by the Holy Spirit in the soul of each one who has been called. Many, starting with those concerned, have cooperated with the Spirit, so that the divine seed of their vocation might mature, encouraging the growth of God's kingdom in the world. It is in this way that the Church grows in the world, like the great tree in the parable whose branches give shelter to the birds of the air and to the man who is tired.

This parable urges us to consider the annual work of the Roman Seminary in the missionary perspective of the growth of that divine tree which develops and gradually expands until it embraces all the countries of the world. Rome's seminary has a very significant role from this point of view. Is not Rome, the see of Peter's Successor, the driving force of missionary activity in every part of the world?

3. St Paul too, in the passage from the Letter to the Corinthians just proclaimed, offers us the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the question of priestly formation. The Apostle writes: "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). And he adds: "We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). What else is seminary formation, the instruction and education received there, if not an introduction to the *theological virtues* which are the foundation of Christian life and, in particular, of priestly life? The greatest of these is *love* (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). Might not the Apostle be referring to love when he says: "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him" (2 Cor 5:9)?

At the end of the academic year, the Apostle seems to be asking each of you this question, dear young men: how has this year served the growth of your faith, hope and love? How has it deepened the gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of God? How deeply is this divine organism rooted in our spiritual organism, in the cognitive forces of our intellect and in the aspirations of our will? "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10). The daily and yearly examination of conscience must be made in this eschatological perspective. We must ask forgiveness for all our acts of negligence, but above all we must give thanks. Today's liturgy also invites us to do this with the words of the Psalm: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High" (Ps 92 [91]:1). To sing and give thanks for what, with God's grace and our co-operation, has become the fruit of this seminary year.

Today we meet on the Vatican Hill, at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. May the words of the

Psalm re-echo in our spirit:

"The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the Lord,
they flourish in the courts of our God" (Ps 92 [91]:12-14).

May these verses help us meditate on our vocation to the service of the Gospel.

May we be accompanied and sustained in the daily task of building God's kingdom by the holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by all the saints and blessed of the Church which is in Rome, the shining examples who have preceded us on the way of faithfully following Christ.

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