



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Fourth Sunday of Easter, 11 May 2003

1. *"I am the good shepherd"* (Jn 10: 11).

In the Gospel passage that today's liturgy presents to us, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

The hireling, who does not regard the sheep as his own, deserts them in the face of difficulty and danger and flees. The shepherd, on the other hand, who knows each one of his sheep, creates a close bond with them, so deep that he is ready to give up his life for them.

With this sublime example of loving dedication, Jesus invites his disciples, particularly priests, to follow in his footsteps. He calls every priest to be a good shepherd of the flock that Providence entrusts to him.

2. Today, dear candidates for ordination to the priesthood, you too are configured to the Good Shepherd, becoming collaborators of the successors of the Apostles.

I greet you all with affection. I greet first of all Cardinal Ruini, Vicar of Rome, the Vicegerent and the Auxiliary Bishops. I greet the Rectors and Superiors of the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary and of the diocesan Seminary *Redemptoris Mater*, who have been in charge of your formation. I greet Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur and the formation teachers of the "Sons of the Cross"; the formation teachers in charge of those among you from the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity and the Society of the Catholic Apostolate.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to your parish communities, to the associations,

movements and groups to which you belong. I thank all those who have helped you to recognize and welcome the Lord's call, and especially your families who have raised you in the faith and are rejoicing with you today.

3. Dear Ordinandi, this will be an unforgettable day for you all. Today you are "promoted to the service of Christ, teacher, priest and king", and given a share in his ministry "through which the Church here on earth is being ceaselessly built up into the People of God, Christ's Body and the temple of the Holy Spirit" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 1).

I would like simply to call your attention to some points that clarify *who the priest is* in God's saving plan, and what the Church and the world expect of him. The priest is *the man of the Word* whose task it is to take the proclamation of the Gospel to the men and women of his time. He must do so with a keen sense of responsibility, constantly striving to be always in full harmony with the Magisterium of the Church. He is also the *man of the Eucharist*, through which he penetrates the heart of the Pascal Mystery. Especially in Holy Mass, he feels the need for an ever more intimate configuration to Jesus the Good Shepherd, supreme and eternal Priest.

Nourish yourselves, therefore, on the word of God; converse each day with Christ, truly present in the sacrament of the Altar. Allow yourselves to be touched by the infinite love of his Heart and spend more time in Eucharistic adoration in the important moments of your life, such as difficult personal and pastoral decisions, at the beginning and end of your day. I can assure you that "I have experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 25).

4. Configured to Christ the Good Shepherd, dear candidates for ordination, you will be *ministers of divine mercy*. You will administer the sacrament of Reconciliation, thereby fulfilling the mandate passed on by the Lord to the Apostles after the Resurrection: "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (Jn 20: 22-23). How many miracles and wonders worked by God's mercy will you witness in the confessional!

But to fulfil worthily the mission that is entrusted to you today demands that you be constantly united with God through prayer and experience his merciful love yourselves by regularly going to Confession, letting expert spiritual counsellors guide you, especially in life's demanding moments.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Rome and you who are gathered round these Ordinandi! The priest, called in a special way *to tend toward holiness*, is *the witness of the love and joy* of Christ for the entire Christian people. After the example of the Good Shepherd, he helps believers to follow Christ, in return for his love. Be close to your priests; accompany them constantly through prayer and ask the Lord insistently for a constant supply of workers for his harvest.

And you, Mary, "Woman of the Eucharist", Mother and model of every priest, be close to these sons of yours today and throughout the years of their pastoral ministry. Like the Apostle John, they too welcome you "into their home". Help them to conform their lives to the divine Teacher who has chosen them as his ministers. May their "*present*", just spoken by each one with youthful enthusiasm, be expressed every day in generous adherence to the tasks of the ministry and blossom in the joy of the "*magnificat*" for the "great things" that God's mercy wills to work through their hands. Amen.

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