



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO A GROUP OF PRIESTS FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN

Saturday, 21 April 1979 Beloved Priests of Milan! Celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of your priestly ordination, you desired to solemnize it with a personal meeting with the Pope, on your return from a devout pilgrimage to Poland, my beloved native land, to the Marian sanctuary of Czestochowa. And I thank you heartily for this filial devotion of yours, and I receive you with deep and sincere affection and extend my greeting to all. I embrace you, indeed, with all the love that must flow from our common priesthood and from my mission as universal Father. Welcome, then, you Superiors who come from Milan, a city famous all over the world for its adventurous history and its intelligent industry; a diocese of great bishops, holy priests, and committed laymen; the land of the painstaking and thoughtful pastoral ministry of my venerated predecessor Paul VI! Welcome, you who have been pilgrims in my homeland, where the long and painful vicissitudes of history are interwoven with a Christian faith that is always sincere and real! But welcome above all to you priests who are celebrating your priestly jubilee! Twenty-five years of priesthood are so many! They are a mystical and precious cathedral constructed with over ten thousand Holy Masses celebrated, with thousands and thousands of absolutions imparted, with innumerable baptisms, marriages, anointings of the sick, administered by means of the divine powers conferred by Jesus himself through the Apostles and the golden chain of the laying on of hands! What can we do if not express our thanks and repeat with the Psalmist: "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo"? (Ps 89, 2). Twenty-five years of priesthood also mean a period of long experience and concrete reflection on the priest's real identity. After so many years of industrious ministry in the Lord's vineyard and harvest, after having "borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (Mt 20:12), it is possible to deduce more easily the essential elements of the Catholic priesthood, strengthening ourselves to persevere and as a lesson for all confreres.

1. Our interior strength lies in our vocation. We have been called! This is the fundamental truth that must instil courage and joy in us! Jesus himself said to the Apostles: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16). And the author of the Letter to the Hebrews cautions: "One does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God!" (Heb 5:4). The call was at first an inner one, mysterious, caused by various reasons; but then, after the long and necessary preparation in the Seminary, under the direction of prudent and responsible superiors, it became official, guaranteed, when the Church called us and consecrated us by means of the bishop. No one, in fact, would dare to become a minister of Christ, in continual contact with the Almighty! No one would have the courage to shoulder the weight of consciences and accept in this way a sacred and mystical solitude! The call gives us the strength to be what we are with constancy and faithfulness; in moments of serenity, but above all in moments of crisis and discouragement, we say to ourselves: "Courage! I have been called!" "Ecce ego, mitte me" (Is 6:8).

2. Our joy is the Eucharist. Let us recall the words of the Divine Master to the Apostles: "I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to

you" (Jn 15:15). The priest is first of all for the Eucharist and lives by the Eucharist. We can "consecrate" and meet Christ personally with the divine power of "transubstantiation"; we can receive in communion Jesus living, true, real we can distribute to souls the Word, incarnate, dead and risen again for the salvation of the world! Every day we are in private audience with Jesus! So always make Holy Mass the driving force of the day, the personal meeting with him who is our only true joy. An adequate preparation and appropriate thanksgiving are, therefore, absolutely necessary at every Holy Mass, to be able to savour the joy of the priesthood.³ Finally, our concern must be love and service of souls, in the place that Providence has assigned to us through our superiors. Wherever we may be, in the bustling parishes of metropolises as in remote mountain villages, there are always persons to love, to serve and to save. We can always meditate on those consoling words that will mark our eternal destiny: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master!" (cf. Mt 25:23). May these words of mine accompany you as a memory of your twenty-fifth anniversary, while I ask you to pray for me, for all priests and that the Lord may bring forth many vocations. May you be assisted, enlightened and strengthened by the Blessed Virgin, whom I address with the very words spoken by Paul VI at the resumption of the Second Vatican Council "Oh Mary, look on us your sons, look on us, brothers and disciples and apostles and continuers of Jesus. Make us aware of our vocation and our mission; make us not unworthy of assuming, in our priesthood, in our word, in the offering of our lives for the faithful entrusted to us, the representation, the personification of Christ. You, full of grace, make the priesthood, which honours you, also be holy and immaculate!" (11 October 1963). And may my comforting Blessing always remain with you! © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana