



The Holy See

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION IN SAINT PETER'S BASILICA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

27 May 1979

1. *"Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen"* (Acts 1:24).

Thus the apostles prayed, gathered in the Upper Room at Jerusalem when, for the first time, they had to fill the place that had remained empty in their community. It was necessary, in fact, for the Twelve to continue to bear witness to the Lord and to his Resurrection. Christ had duly constituted the Twelve. And now, after the loss of Judas, it was necessary to face for the first time the duty of *deciding in the Lord's name who was to take the vacant place.*

Then those gathered pray precisely in this way: "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship..." (Acts 1:24-25).

What took place so long ago in the early Church, *is repeated also today.* Behold, those who are to take the different places "in the ministry and apostleship", have been chosen. They have been chosen after the fervent prayer of the whole Church and of every community that needs them and which they will serve.

So you have been chosen, dear Brothers. Today you are here at St Peter's tomb to *receive episcopal consecration.* Certainly today, too, as during the whole preceding period of preparation for episcopal ordination, each of you repeats in this Basilica: "Lord, you know the hearts of all men. You know my heart too. Lord, you yourself have been pleased to choose me. You yourself once said to the apostles, after calling them: '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).

2. "As far as the east is from the west..." (Ps 103:12).

You have really come here today, revered and dear Brothers, from the east and the west, from the south and the north. Your presence expresses *the paschal joy of the Church*, which can already testify in the various parts of the earth "that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world" (1 Jn 4:14).

At this point, I would like, in beautiful and poetic and, at the same time, simple, language, to describe and, as it were, gather the countries from which you ordinands come, beginning with the most distant East, the Philippines, India, and then, through Africa (Sudan and Ethiopia), to arrive at South America (Brazil, Nicaragua, Chile) and North America (United States, Canada), and then back again to Europe (Italy, Bulgaria, Spain and Norway).

Time, unfortunately, does not allow me to do so. The presence among the ordinands of a Bishop from Bulgaria offers me, however, the welcome opportunity of addressing a special thought to that noble nation, which has been Christian for so many centuries. I take advantage of this happy occasion to send an affectionate greeting to all my Catholic brothers and sisters, of Latin and of Byzantine rite. Although their number is not large, they bear witness to the vitality of their faith in love for their country and in service of the communities to which they belong. A respectful greeting also to the venerable Bulgarian Orthodox Church and to all its children.

Among the ordinands there are also three archbishops, called to serve, particularly, the universal mission of the Apostolic See: the Secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church and two Pontifical Representatives. Their mandate springs, as a natural and necessary requirement, from the specific function entrusted to Peter within the Apostolic College and the whole ecclesial community. Their task is, therefore, to be ministers of "catholic" unity, as "servants of the servants of God", together with , the one whom they represent.

3. And now, shortly, by means of episcopal consecration, you will receive *special participation in Christ's priesthood*, the fullest participation. In this way you will become pastors of the People of God in different places of the earth, each one with his own duty in the service of the Church.

As the Second Vatican Council recalled, it was Christ himself who willed that "the successors of the apostles, that is, the Bishops, should be pastors in his Church for all ages" (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8). Obedient to this will of their Master, the apostles "not only had various helpers in their ministry, but... in order that the mission entrusted to them might be continued after their death, they consigned... to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun. ...Thus, according to the testimony of St Irenaeus, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved in the whole world by those who were made bishops by the apostles and by their successors down to our own time (*ibid.* n. 20). The Council illustrated amply the essential function that the Bishops carry out in the life of the

Church. Among the many texts which refer to this subject, let it suffice to recall the vigorous synthesis contained in that passage of *Lumen Gentium* where, on the basis of the datum of faith according to which "in the person of the bishops... the Lord Jesus Christ is present...", it is deduced with logical consistency that Christ "above all through their signal service preaches the Word of God to all peoples and administers without cease to the faithful the sacraments of faith; that through their paternal care (cf. 1 Cor 4:15) he incorporates, by a supernatural rebirth, new members into his body; that finally, through their wisdom and prudence he directs and guides the people of the New Testament on their journey towards eternal beatitude" (n. 21).

In the light of these clear and rich conciliar affirmations, I express the deep joy it gives me to confer episcopal consecration on you today dear Brothers, and in this way bring you into the college of the Bishops of Christ's Church: with this act, in fact, I can show *particular esteem and love* for your fellow-countrymen, your nations and the local Churches from which you have been chosen and for the good of which you are constituted Pastors (cf. Heb 5:1).

Together with you I meditate on the words of the Gospel today: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15). And I wish with my whole heart to *congratulate you on this friendship*. What could be greater? And therefore I wish you nothing else but this: abide in the love of Christ! (cf. Jn 15:10); abide in his friendship. Abide in it as he abides in the Father's love.

May this love and this friendship fill your life completely and become the inspiring source of your works in the service you assume today. I wish you *abundant and happy fruits in this ministry of yours*: "that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16), that the Father may give you everything you ask him for in the name of Christ (cf. Jn 15:16)—his eternal Son.

May your mission and your ministry lead to the strengthening of mutual love, common love, and of the union of the People of God in Christ's Church, since *it is in love and union that there is revealed, in all its luminous simplicity, the face of God: Father and Son and Holy Spirit; God who is love* (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).

And what the world, that world to which we are sent, needs most is precisely love!

