



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

MASS WITH PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Kaduna (Nigeria)

Sunday, 14 February 1982

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.

1. It is indeed a joy to be in Kaduna today. I give thanks to God for this blessed opportunity of celebrating the Eucharist with all of you and of ordaining to the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ this large number of deacons from different dioceses in Nigeria. The lives of those to be ordained offer great promise for the continued growth of the Church in this beloved land and they give fresh impetus to the vital work of exangelization. With all the faithful in Nigeria, and with the Church throughout the world, I praise the Lord of the harvest who is sending these new labourers into his harvest.

2. On this joyful day permit me to direct my words in a special way to those who are about to be ordained. My brothers, each of you has received from the Lord the call to be a priest, and with that, the privilege of being called a servant of Jesus Christ. Ordination confers the authority and mandate to proclaim the Gospel and to preach in the name of the Church. As a priest you will preside at the celebration of the Eucharist, and in the name of Christ you will forgive sins in the Sacrament of Penance. In these and in the many other activities by which you will give the Church of God a shepherd's care, seek always to be regarded as one who serves. May the words of the Second Eucharistic Prayer be expressive of your constant gratitude for your vocation: "Father, we

thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you”.

You have been called to imitate the Lord and Master whom you love, to follow the example of the Son of Man who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life in ransom for many”.

Remember also that Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that they are never to lord it over their fellows or seek to make their authority felt. Like Saint Paul, we count it a privilege to be called a servant of Christ Jesus.

3. One of the most striking characteristics of Jesus’ earthly life was the priority he gave to prayer.

Saint Luke tells us that “large crowds would gather to bear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray”. While he had great compassion for the multitude and burning zeal for proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near, still Jesus would regularly and frequently seek out a quiet place in order to be alone with his heavenly Father. Sometimes he would even spend the entire night in prayer.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us of the intensity of Jesus’ prayer: “During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears”. With his whole heart and soul Jesus cried out to his Father for the needs of the-people, and he sought the strength to conform his human actions with the Father’s will.

My brothers, we must never forget this lesson which our Saviour left us by word and example.

Prayer is a vital ingredient of the Christian life, and it is one of the main ways in which a priest serves his people. It is through prayer too that we preserve and deepen our personal love for Christ, and the will of God for us.

Time spent in prayer is not time taken from our people. It is time spent for them with the Lord, who is the source of all good. This is why the Church does not hesitate to require her ordained ministers to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Always be faithful to this commitment, for the Liturgy of the Hours unites us with the Church throughout the world in the great work of praising and worshipping the living God.

4. The Letter to the Hebrews also instructs us that our Lord and Master, during his life on earth, “learnt to obey through suffering”. Suffering is an inevitable part of discipleship. That is why Jesus told his followers: “Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple”. This is not to forget or overlook the fact that faith in Christ is the source of deep joy, and that Jesus promised his disciples a peace which the world cannot give. But it remains true that suffering will be part of serving Christ. And suffering is closely related to obedience, for when we accept the suffering which divine providence allows, we are conforming ourselves more closely to

the will of the heavenly Father.

Today you promise not only to me, but also to your bishop, obedience and respect. By this promise you form a special bond of trust with your bishop and his successors. You have declared that you will cooperate with him and will carry out his directives and commands for the good of the local Church, in a spirit of love and respect. In this, you are imitating Christ, who came not to do his own will but the will of him who sent him. Remember that our salvation was accomplished through the saving work of the Son of God who emptied himself, took the form of a slave and became obedient unto death.

5. The first reading of today's Mass contains a description of ministry which Jesus applied to himself at the beginning of his public life, and which every priest can make his own, no matter how many years he has been ordained: "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison".

Notice that the anointed of the Lord are sent to the poor, to prisoners, to those whose hearts are broken. In other words, God's anointed ones are sent to people who stand in special need of God's mercy. That is why I wrote in my Encyclical Letter "Dives in Misericordia": "The Church must bear witness to the mercy of God revealed in Christ, in the whole of his mission as Messiah, professing it in the first place as a salvific truth of faith and as necessary for a life in harmony with faith, and then seeking to introduce it and to make it incarnate in the lives both of her faithful and as far as possible in the lives of all people of good will".

As priests, you have a unique opportunity and responsibility to proclaim the mercy of God. By our pastoral gentleness and compassion, you show people the tenderness of Christ; through your zealous preaching and teaching you proclaim God's goodness and tell of his power to save. As ministers of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you put them in touch with our Lord, who is rich in mercy.

6. On this joyous day I cannot refrain from saying a word about the great need for vocations to the religious life and to the priesthood. For the words of our Saviour make us reflect: "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest". As we rejoice today at the ordination of these new priests, we see in their hearts, which are so eager to serve, a great hope for the future of the Church.

At the same time, I appeal to the people of God to be mindful of the great need to encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Our Lord Jesus Christ will not fail to provide for the life of his Church, but he asks for the prayers and collaboration of everyone. Christian families have a particular role to play in creating the atmosphere of faith in which a vocation can develop. And you, the new priests of today, always be mindful of the importance of your example and the

joyful witness of your celibate lives.

I entrust you today to Mary the Mother of God. May she be close to you always and preserve you for ever in the love of her Son, our High Priest Jesus Christ.

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