



The Holy See

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS
WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Sunday, 14 May 2000

1. *"I am the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10: 11, 14).*

Christ's words echo today throughout the Church. He, the Lord, is the Shepherd who lays down his life for his flock. He is the fulfilment of the promise made by the God of Israel through the mouth of the prophets: "Behold, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out" (Ez 34: 11).

On this Sunday, commonly called "Good Shepherd Sunday", the Church celebrates the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and on this day I am pleased to ordain 26 new priests for the Diocese of Rome. They are the priests of the Year 2000, chosen to proclaim the Gospel in our Diocese. Dear candidates, I offer you my most cordial welcome and extend it to all those relatives, teachers and friends who have gathered with you at this unforgettable moment in your life.

2. *"The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10: 11).* Christ shepherds the People of God with the power of his love, offering himself in sacrifice. He fulfils his mission as Shepherd by making himself the sacrificial Lamb. *Sacerdos et hostia*. No one however forces him to do this: it is he himself who offers his own life, in absolute freedom, to take it up again (cf. Jn 10: 17) and thus to triumph "for our sake" where we were condemned to defeat. *"Agnus redemit oves"*.

He is "the stone which the builders rejected which has become the cornerstone" (cf. Ps 117: 22; Acts 4: 11). This is the marvellous work of God, who exalted his Son, giving him "the name which is above every other name": the only name by which we can be saved (cf. Acts 4: 12).

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, today you, dear deacons, are being ordained priests.

3. *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!" (Ps 117: 1, 29).*

Dear ordinands, you are becoming priests during the Great Jubilee, in the "year of the Lord's favour" (*Is 61: 2*). The inexhaustible grace of the sacrament will transform you inwardly, so that your life, joined for ever to that of Christ the Priest, may become a hymn to God's love: *"Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo" (Ps 88: 2).*

The mystery of divine, creative and redeeming love, revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and fulfilled in his paschal sacrifice, is so great that it will superabundantly fill every day and every moment of your ministry. Draw unceasingly from this mystery, especially in the celebration of Holy Mass, the spiritual energy to fulfil your mission faithfully. Through your hands the Good Shepherd will continue to offer his life sacramentally for the world's salvation, drawing everyone to himself and inviting everyone to welcome the embrace of the one Father. Be always conscious of and grateful for this gift which Providence generously gives you today.

In a little while the Church will advise each of you: "Know what you are doing and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's Cross" (*Rite*). Model your life on the mystery of Christ's Cross!

It is Christ who saves and sanctifies, and you will share directly in his work to the extent of the intensity of your union with him. If you abide in him, you will bear abundant fruit; but without him you can do nothing (cf. *Jn 15: 5*). He has chosen you and today "appoints" you so that you will go and bear fruit, and your fruit will abide (cf. *Jn 15: 16*).

4. Dear deacons, you belong to the *Diocese of Rome* and have completed your formation in the seminaries of this Church: the Roman Major Seminary, the Almo Capranica College, the "Redemptoris Mater" Seminary and the Seminary of the Oblates of Divine Love. I would like to thank all those who have accompanied and guided you on the path that has led you here. I am thinking of your parents and of the priests who have helped you in your vocational decision by their example and advice. I am thinking of those responsible for your theological, spiritual and pastoral training, the superiors of the Roman seminaries, whom I cordially encourage to continue their service with generous commitment, so that the Church of Rome will be enriched by numerous and well-formed priests. The joy of seeing you as priests ever faithful to your mission will be the greatest reward for everyone.

May your example also encourage other young men to follow Christ as willingly. We pray for this on this day dedicated to vocations: May the "Lord of the harvest" continue to call workers for the service of his kingdom because "the harvest is plentiful" (*Mt 9: 37*).

5. Dear ordinands, *may Blessed Mary*, the model for every call of special consecration in the Church, *watch over your vocation*. At this moment Christ is again entrusting you to her, repeating to each of you what he said from the Cross to the Apostle John: "Behold, your mother!" (*Jn* 19: 27).

I entrust you and your ministry to the *Salus Populi Romani*. She will know how to guide you, day after day, to become one with the Good Shepherd, especially in the daily celebration of the Eucharist.

And you, "Good Shepherd, true Bread, nourish and protect us" for an ever more generous service to your Church, which works in the world for the salvation of humanity. Amen.

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