



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 21 April 2002

1. *"Imitate the mystery you celebrate" [The Italian version says: "Live the mystery that is placed in your hands"] (Rite for the Ordination of Priests).*

Dear Deacons, when I present to you the paten and chalice for the Eucharistic sacrifice, I will address these words to each of you. You, who are going to be ordained priests, know that the congregation here present with you in St Peter's Basilica looks upon you with great affection. The entire Diocese of Rome is praying with you and for you as do the communities you belong to.

I, too, greet you warmly as I thank God for the gift of your priesthood. At the same time, I express deep gratitude to those who have guided your formation, to your families and to all who have helped you to respond generously to the Lord's call. I am sure they will continue to be close to you, so that you may persevere in the priestly ministry and be able to bring to completion the mission that the Lord entrusts to you.

2. *"Imitate the mystery you celebrate". What else is this mystery but the Holy Eucharist? For "in it is contained all the spiritual wealth of the Church" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5). The mystery is Christ, Bread of life, who gave himself "for the life of the world" (Jn 6,51). The mystery is Christ, the shepherd and the door of the sheep, "who came that they [human beings] may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10,10).*

"Good Shepherd, true Bread of life!", the Christian people sing before the Blessed Sacrament, recognizing and adoring the real presence of Jesus, their guide and their nourishment on the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Dear friends! You are already ordained ministers of the mystery that is Christ, Bread of life and Good Shepherd, as deacons of the holy Church of God. But today, through the grace of the sacrament that you are going to receive, you will be ordained ministers in a new and excellent way.

The special character that the Holy Spirit will imprint upon you *will configure you to Christ the Priest*, so that in the most important actions of your ministry you will act *in the name and in the person of Christ the Head: "in persona Christi Capitis"* (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 2). Great is the gift that you receive, and great is the mystery placed in your hands!

3. Jesus not only makes you sharers in the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but he expects an even higher fidelity consistent with the apostolic ministry that is entrusted to you. He calls you to remain with him (cf. Mk 3,14) in privileged intimacy. He demands a stricter poverty of you (cf. Mt 19,22-23) and the humility of the servant who makes himself the last of all (cf. Mt 20,25-27). He asks you to be perfect, "as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48). In a word, the Lord wants you to be holy. *Holiness* is the perspective in which the Church's entire pastoral life must be placed (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 30).

"The vocation to holiness" is the theme for the *Day of Prayer for Vocations* that is being observed today throughout the world. "Every vocation in the Church is at the service of holiness", I wrote in the Message for today's observance. "Some however, such as the vocations to the ordained ministry and consecrated life, are at the service of holiness in a thoroughly unique manner" (n. 2, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 December 2001, p. 3).

4. "*Imitate the mystery you celebrate*". Another important aspect of the mystery whose ministers you are about to become is the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, closely connected with the Eucharist. In my *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday*, which today I consign to you spiritually, I dwelt upon this sacrament.

Dear candidates to the priesthood, be *holy ministers of the divine mercy*. Experience for yourselves the wonderful grace of reconciliation as a profound necessity and a longed-for gift. Thus, you will restore vigour and enthusiasm to your journey of holiness and to your ministry. *God counts on the faithful availability of each of you* to work extraordinary miracles of love in the hearts of the faithful. At the fount of reconciliation, of which you must be generous and faithful dispensers, the baptized will be able to have the *living and consoling experience of Christ the Good Shepherd*, who rejoices over every sheep that is lost and found.

Prepare carefully for this ministry! It requires *adequate and constant* spiritual, theological, liturgical and pastoral *formation*. The wisdom and example of the saints will be of great help to you.

5. "*Behold, your mother!*" (Jn 19,27). At this crucial moment of your life, I wish to entrust each of

you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Mother of the Good Shepherd, Mother of priests*. Before he died, Christ entrusted her, as his most precious treasure, to all his disciples in the person of the Apostle John. The Apostle took her into his own home.

Dear candidates to the priesthood, accept her as a sure and consoling pledge of Christ's love. Look to her constantly as the image and model of the Church, whom you will serve with all your energy.

Your priesthood, offered daily to Mary, will become a genuine path of holiness and your whole life will be joyfully consecrated to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

So may it be for each of you, with God's help! Amen!

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