



The Holy See

**LETTER
OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO PRIESTS
FOR HOLY THURSDAY 1992**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser" (Jn 15:1).

Dear Brother Priests,

1. Allow me to call to mind today the above words from the Gospel according to John. They are linked to the Liturgy of Holy Thursday: "Before the feast of Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come" (Jn 13:1), he washed his disciples' feet, and then spoke to them intimately and with great candour, as Saint John tells us. This Farewell Discourse also contains the allegory of the vine and the branches: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

It is precisely to this text that I wish to refer on Holy Thursday in this year of the Lord 1992, as I offer to the Church the Apostolic Exhortation on priestly formation. It is the result of the collegial work of the 1990 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which was entirely devoted to that subject. We worked out together a much-needed and awaited document of the Church's Magisterium, which brings together both the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and reflections on the experiences of the twenty-five years since the end of the Council.

2. Today I wish to place this result of the Synod Fathers' prayer and reflection at the feet of Christ the Priest and Pastor of our souls (cf. 1 Pt 2:25). Together with you, I wish to receive this text from the altar of the one and eternal Priesthood of the Redeemer, which in a sacramental way became our portion at the last Supper.

Christ is the true Vine. If the Eternal Father cultivates his vineyard in this world, he does so in the

power of the Truth and Life which are in the Son. Here are found the ever-new beginning and inexhaustible source of the formation of every Christian, and especially of every priest. On Holy Thursday let us try in a particular way to grow in our awareness of this reality and in the attitude needed for us to be able to remain, in Christ, open to the breath of the Spirit of Truth, and to bear abundant fruit in God's vineyard.

3. As we join in the Holy Thursday Liturgy with all the Pastors of the Church, let us give thanks for the gift of the Priesthood which we share. At the same time let us pray that all those throughout the world who are offered the grace of a priestly vocation will respond to this gift, so that there will be no lack of labourers for the great harvest (cf. Mt 9:37).

As I express this hope I send to all of you an affectionate greeting and my Apostolic Blessing.

Given at the Vatican, on 29 March, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, in the year 1992, the fourteenth of my Pontificate.