



The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PRIESTS AND SEMINARIANS**

*Auditorium of the Sacred Heart, Cebu City
Thursday, 19 February 1981*

Dear priests and seminarians,

I greet you in the Name of Jesus ! It is a joy for me to be with you, and through you to greet the priests of all the Philippines, and to bless and encourage the seminarians throughout this nation.

1. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, 'Your God is King'"^[1]. These words of the prophet Isaiah readily come to mind when we recall the apostolic zeal of those *missionary priests* who over four centuries ago *began to preach the Gospel of salvation* to the people of these islands. It was the mysterious working of God's grace which made their hearts anxious and set their feet in motion until peace and salvation had been announced in this land.

Consider the Dominican priest Fray Domingo de Salazar. He left his native Spain to go first to Venezuela, then to Mexico, briefly to Florida, and finally to the Philippines. Here he became the first Bishop in the Philippines—at Manila in 1578 ; here he preached the Good News not only to the people of these islands but also to his compatriots, in order to persuade them that the Lord's Gospel means justice and not slavery for the people they had come to colonize. It was Bishop Domingo de Salazar too, who, on his return to Spain, recommended the foundation of the ecclesiastical province of the Philippines.

2. *You are the heirs of the missionary task* begun by Fray Domingo and the early evangelists of these islands : the Augustinian, Franciscan, Jesuit and Dominican priests whose evangelizing feet will forever be called beautiful. In paying homage to those missionaries and to all the other missionaries—to those of every generation in the Philippines, including the present generation—I praise the grace of God that sustained them in their zeal for his Kingdom.

In God's mysterious design you have been called by Christ to announce his glad tidings here in your own homeland. Together let us reflect upon this priestly task which is yours today, my brother priests, and for which, dear seminarians, you must diligently prepare yourselves.

3. It is faith in Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever, that is the response which God invites when he sends out his word over the earth. *It is faith at the heart of the priest's vocation* that animates his ministry and grounds the witness of his life. In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul says : " If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Faith in the heart leads to justification, confession on the lips to salvation. But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? Scripture says, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news !'... Faith, then, comes through hearing, and what is heard is the word of Christ"[2].

4. To preach the word of God : this is the work of every generation. The " faith which comes through hearing" is a response invited by God himself, a response which leads people to confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and to become his disciples. *The proclamation of the word and the response of faith set up the initial encounter, the basic community of the Church.* And it is for this encounter that the priestly apostle is "sent" to preach : *in persona Christi* he offers the Sacrifice of the Eucharist, which recapitulates the entire proclamation of the word in which Christ's own invitation to believe and to be built up into the Church is continually heard by his people. As the Vatican Council teaches : " By sacred ordination and by the mission they receive from their bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ, the Teacher, the Priest, and the King. They share in his ministry of unceasingly building up the Church on earth into the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Spirit"[3].

This Church is missionary by her very nature[4]. All Christians who believe and are made one in Christ share in the missionary task of apostolic service to the world. But "hearing" the call to faith—the word of salvation—must be a constant summons to conversion and renewal within the Church herself, and it is to the Apostles and their successors in the Episcopate, together with their priestly collaborators, that the Lord has entrusted the role of shepherding his missionary people. By God's own plan, *the Church cannot exist without those apostolic men "sent" to preach*, to be within the Church herself a sacramental sign of the fundamental and perennial call to " believe in our hearts" that Jesus is Lord.

6. Today there are some who ignore or *misunderstand this important dimension of the nature of the Church*, and suggest that only by diminishing the importance of the priesthood can the laity be given their full place in the Church. Perhaps this is due to an over-reaction to those priests who, through human frailty or spiritual blindness, have not taken to heart the profound lesson Jesus taught when he replied to the request of the mother of James and John : "You know how those who exercise authority among the Gentiles lord it over them : their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be like that with you. Anyone who aspires to greatness must serve the rest, and whoever wants to rank first among you must serve the needs of all. Such is the case with the Son of Man who has come, not to be served by others, but to serve, to give his own life as a ransom for the many"[5].

Nevertheless, an attitude which sees opposition or rivalry between the ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the faithful fails to perceive the design of God in instituting the Sacrament of Holy Orders within his Church. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church clearly teaches that "though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ"[6].

In the ministerial priesthood of Holy Orders, God has set within his Church a visible sign, by which the divine dialogue which he has initiated—the word of salvation inviting the response of faith—is sacramentally, and therefore efficaciously, represented. Priesthood is therefore a sacrament whose "celebration" affects the entire Church, and the whole Church—laity and clergy alike—must take care that its "celebration" is not diminished through misunderstanding or misplaced zeal for a multiplication of *ministries intended as a substitution for the ministerial priesthood*.

7. Jesus is Lord ! *This proclamation of the word reaches its most perfect moment in the Eucharist*. "The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed towards it ... Hence the Eucharist shows itself to be the source and summit of all evangelization"[7]. The celebration of the Eucharist is the heart of priestly ministry and of Christian life, because it is Christ's own service of self-sacrificing love. Through each Eucharist the Church herself is continually formed anew and given her definitive shape: Christ, through the ministry of his priests, calls all his disciples together, makes them one in his love, and sends them forth to be bearers of the unity and love of the Eucharistic banquet as the pattern and model of all human community and service.

8. My brother priests, this missionary Church, this Eucharistic people, depends upon you for the authentic proclamation of the Good News. But if you are *to be effective preachers of the word, you must be men of deep faith who are hearers and doers of the word* as well. For with Saint Paul we must always say : "It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake"[8]. For this reason we must never cease examining carefully how we live our priestly lives, lest they become a countersign which disfigures the sacramental presence which

the Lord intends us to be in and for his Church.

9. For this purpose I offer you today three brief reflections on living the priestly life according to the mind and heart of Christ.

In the first place, *Jesus has called priests to a special intimacy with himself*. The very nature of our task requires it. If we are to preach Christ and not ourselves, we must know him intimately in the Scriptures and in prayer. If we are to lead others to the encounter and response of faith, our own faith must itself be a witness. In the Holy Scriptures, God's word is ever before us. Let us therefore make the Scriptures the nourishment of our daily prayer and the subject of our regular theological study. Only in this way can we possess the word of God—and be possessed by the Word—in that intimacy reserved for those to whom Jesus said : " I call you friends"[9].

The second consideration I wish to offer you concerns the *unity of the priesthood*. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us that "all priests, together with bishops, so share in one and the same priesthood and ministry of Christ that the very unity of their consecration and mission requires their hierarchical communion with the order of bishops"[10]. This unity must take shape concretely in the realization that priests, diocesan and religious, form a single *presbyterium* around their bishop.

The collegiality which describes the entire episcopal order's union of faith and sharing in responsibility with the Bishop of Rome is reflected by analogy in the unity of priests with their Bishop and with each other in their common pastoral task. We must not underestimate the importance of this unity of our priesthood for the effective evangelization of the world.

The sacramental sign of priesthood itself must not be fragmented or individualized : we constitute one priesthood—the priesthood of Christ—to which our harmony of life and apostolic service must testify. The fundamental oneness of the Eucharist offered by the Church requires that this unity be lived out as a visible, sacramental reality in the lives of priests. On the night before he died, Jesus invoked his heavenly Father : " I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you ; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me"[11].

Our unity in the Lord, sacramentally visible at the center of the Church's own unity, is an indispensable condition for the effectiveness of everything we do: our preaching of the faith, our service of the poor as a preferential option, our efforts at building basic Christian communities as vital units of God's Kingdom, our work for promoting Christ's justice and his peace, all our varied parochial apostolates, every endeavor to furnish spiritual leadership to our people—all of this depends totally on our union with Jesus Christ and his Church.

In the third place I wish to reflect with you on *the value of a life of authentic priestly celibacy*. It is

difficult to overestimate the profound witness to the faith that a priest gives through celibacy. The priest announces the Good News of the kingdom as one unafraid to forgo the special human joys of marriage and family life in order to bear witness to his "conviction about things we do not see"[12].

The Church needs the witness of celibacy willingly embraced and joyfully lived by her priests for the sake of the Kingdom. For celibacy is by no means marginal to priestly life; it gives testimony to a dimension of love patterned upon the love of Christ himself. This love speaks clearly the language of all genuine love, the language of the gift of oneself for the sake of the beloved; and its perfect symbol is forever the Cross of Jesus Christ !

10. My dear seminarians ! All that I have already said to my brother priests I say with you in mind. This precious time of seminary formation is given to you so that a solid foundation may be laid for the task that awaits you as priests. You may be sure that the whole Church looks on with prayerful anticipation as the Lord's words to you—" Come, follow me"—take ever deeper root in your lives. And what is true of all God's people is all the more true of these priests whose companions in preaching the word of God you are preparing to become.

For the priests know well how much work is to be done and they have " prayed the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest"[13]. They now rejoice to see in you an answer to their fervent prayer. Hence you seminarians are already united with the priests in this prayer for an increase of priestly vocations. To those young people in whom the Lord is even now planting the hidden seeds of this vocation you must offer yourselves as companions and guides, and you must be eager to set before them the example of your own intimate union with Jesus and of your own zealous apostolic service of his people.

Yes, you must always keep Jesus before your eyes. He is the real reason why you are in the seminary ; it can never be for any motive of personal advancement or prestige, but only to prepare for a ministry of service based on the word of the Lord. Jesus has chosen you to bring the light of his word to your brothers and sisters. You can see, then, how important it is for you personally to know the word of God, to embrace it with all its challenges of love and sacrifice, and, like Mary, to reflect on it in your hearts[14]. The seminary exists to prepare you for your mission of proclaiming the holiness and truth of the Incarnate Word of God. But if the seminary is to fulfill its purpose in your regard, you must open your hearts in generosity to the Spirit of God, so that he may form Jesus in you.

11. Jesus is Lord ! As Saint Paul assures us, "No one can say ` Jesus is Lord', except in the Holy Spirit"[15]. Let us be confident in *the Holy Spirit's guidance of the whole Church*, and in his power that is active in our priestly ministry. With trust and untiring zeal, let us preach the word of Christ so as to bring spontaneously to the lips of our brothers and sisters the refrain of the prophet : "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace,

bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, 'Your God is King' !".

May Mary, Regina Cleri, Mother of priests and seminarians, help you to place your complete confidence in that same Holy Spirit, who caused her to become the Mother of Jesus, who is Lord forever !

[1] *Is* 52:7.

[2] *Rom* 10:9-17.

[3] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1.

[4] Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 2.

[5] *Mt.* 20:25-8.

[6] *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

[7] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

[8] *2 Cor* 4:5.

[9] *Jn* 15:15.

[10] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7.

[11] *Jn* 17:20-21.

[12] *Heb* 11:1.

[13] *Mt* 9:37.

[14] Cf. *Lk* 2:51.

[15] *1 Cor* 12:3.

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