



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION WITH A GROUP OF DEACONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Cappella Paolina

Saturday, 21 April 1979

Dearly beloved Deacons,

IN THE LONG HISTORY of the Church in Rome, it is not uncommon to see deacons associated with the Pope in his ministry, to see deacons at his side. And this morning it is a special joy for me to be surrounded by deacons, as our relationship – our ecclesial communion – reaches its highest expression in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Our joy is enhanced – yours and mine – to have some of your parents and loved ones here. All of us have come to celebrate the Paschal Mystery and to experience the love of Jesus. His is a sacrificial love – a love that moved him to lay down his life for his people and to take it up again. And his sacrificial love has been manifested with great generosity in your parents' lives, and today it is very fitting that they should have an exceptional moment of serenity, satisfaction and wholesome pride.

As we commemorate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we reflect on his various appearances, as recorded in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles: his appearance to Mary Magdalen, to the two disciples, to the Eleven Apostles. We renew our faith – our holy Catholic faith – and we rejoice and exult because the Lord is truly risen, alleluia! Today more than ever before we are conscious of what it means to be an Easter people and to have the alleluia as our song.

The Easter event – the bodily Resurrection of Christ – pervades the life of the whole Church. It gives to Christians everywhere strength at every turn in life. It makes us sensitive to humanity with all its limitations, sufferings and needs. The Resurrection has immense power to liberate, to uplift,

to bring about justice, to effect holiness, to cause joy.

But for you, Deacons, there is a particular message this morning. By your sacred ordination you have been associated in a special way with the Gospel of the Risen Christ. You have been commissioned to render a special type of service, diaconia, in the name of the Risen Lord. During the ordination ceremony the Bishop told each of you: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach". And so you are called to take the words of the Acts of the Apostles to heart. In the rank of deacons you have come to be associated with Peter and John and all the apostles. You support the apostolic ministry and share in its proclamation. Like the Apostles you too must feel impelled to proclaim by word and deed the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. You too must experience the need to do good, to render service in the name of the crucified and Risen Jesus – to bring God's word into the lives of his holy people.

In today's first reading we hear the Apostles saying: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard". And you are called, in the obedience of faith, to proclaim on the basis of their testimony – on the basis of what has been handed down in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – the great mystery of the Risen Lord, who in his very act of Resurrection communicates eternal life to all his brethren because he communicates his victory over sin and death. Remember that the Apostles by their proclamation of Resurrection were a challenge and reproof to many. And they were warned never to speak again in the name of the Risen Jesus. But their response was immediate and clear: "You must judge whether in God's eyes it is right to listen to you and not to God".

And in this obedience to God they found the supreme measure of paschal joy.

It is the same for you, the new deacons of this Easter season. As the associates of the Bishops and priests of the Church, your discipleship will be marked by these two characteristics: obedience and joy. Each, in this own way, will show the authenticity of your lives. Your ability to communicate the Gospel will depend on your adherence to the faith of the Apostles. The effectiveness of your diaconia will be measured by fidelity of your obedience to the mandate of the Church. It is the Risen Christ who has called you, and it is his Church that sends you forth to proclaim the message transmitted by the Apostles. And it is the Church that authenticates your ministry. Be confident that the very power of the Gospel you proclaim will fill you with the most sublime joy: sacrificial joy, yes, but the transforming joy of being intimately associated with the Risen Jesus in his triumphant mission of salvation. All the disciples of Jesus and you Deacons by a special title, are called to share the immense Easter joy experienced by Blessed Mother. At the Resurrection of her Son, we see Mary as *Mater plena sanctae laetitiae*, becoming for all us *Causa nostrae laetitiae*.

Obedience and joy are then true expression of your discipleship. But they are also conditions for

your effective ministry, and at the same time gifts of God's grace – effects of the very mystery of the Resurrection that you proclaim.

Dear Deacons, I speak to you as sons and brothers and friends. This is a day of special joy. But let it also be a day of special resolve. In the presence of the Pope, under the gaze of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in the company of Stephen, before the witness of your parents, and in the communion of the universal Church, renew again your ecclesial consecration to Jesus Christ, whom you serve and whose life-giving message you are called to transmit in all its purity and integrity, with all its exigencies and in all its power. And know that it is with immense love that I repeat to you and to your brother deacons throughout the Church the words of this morning's Gospel, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News to all creation".

This is the meaning of your ministry. This will be your greatest service to humanity. This is your response to God's love. Amen.

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