



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF FIVE NEW BISHOPS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 12 September 2009

Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We greet with affection and cordially join in the joy of our five brother priests whom the Lord has called to be successors of the Apostles: Mons. Gabriele Giordano Caccia, Mons. Franco Coppola, Mons. Pietro Parolin, Mons. Raffaello Martinelli and Mons. Giorgio Corbellini. I am grateful to each one of them for the faithful service they have rendered to the Church, working in the [Secretariat of State](#), the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) or the [Governorate of Vatican City State](#). I am certain that in their new fields of pastoral action they will carry out with the same love for Christ and the same zeal for souls the ministry that is entrusted to them today with their episcopal Ordination. In accordance with the Apostolic Tradition, this Sacrament is conferred through the imposition of hands and prayer. The laying on of hands takes place in silence. Human words are hushed. The soul opens in silence to God whose hand reaches out to the man and takes him for his own. At the same time, he invests him to protect him so that he may become entirely God's property, belonging to him fully and leading men and women into God's hands. Prayer follows, however, as a second fundamental element of the act of consecration. Episcopal Ordination is an event of prayer. No man can make another man a priest or a Bishop. It is the Lord himself, through the words of prayer and the act of the imposition of hands, who takes that man totally into his service, draws him into his own Priesthood. It is he himself who consecrates those chosen. He himself the one High Priest who offered the one sacrifice for us all confers on him participation in his own Priesthood so that his word and his work may be present in all the ages.

In her Liturgy the Church has developed an eloquent sign for this connection between prayer and

Christ's action on the human being: during the prayer of Ordination the open Book of the Gospels is placed on the candidate's head. The Gospel must penetrate him, the living word of God must, so to speak, permeate him. The Gospel is, at its core, not only a word Christ himself is the Gospel. With the word, the very life of Christ must enter into that man so that he may become entirely one with him and so that Christ may live in him and give shape and content to his life. In this way what appears as the essence of the priestly ministry of Christ in the Readings of today's Liturgy must be brought about in him. The man consecrated must be filled with and live on the Spirit of God. He must bring to the poor the Good News the true freedom and hope that gives life to human beings and heal them. He must establish the Priesthood of Christ among men and women, the Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, that is, the kingdom of justice and peace. Like the 72 disciples sent out by the Lord, he must be one who brings healing, who helps to heal man's inner wound, a person's distance from God. The first and essential good which man needs is closeness to God himself. The Kingdom of God of which the Gospel passage speaks today is not something "next to" God, not some worldly condition: it is simply the presence of God himself, which is the truly healing force.

Jesus summed up all these multiple aspects of his Priesthood in a single sentence: "The Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10: 45).

Serving, and in so doing giving oneself; existing not for oneself but for others, on behalf of God and in view of God: this is the innermost core of Jesus Christ's mission and at the same time the true essence of his Priesthood. Thus he made the term "servant" his highest title of honour. He brought about with it an overturning of values, he gave us a new image of God and of man. Jesus does not come in the guise of a master of this world but the One who is the true Master comes as a servant. His Priesthood is not dominion but service: this is the new Priesthood of Jesus Christ, in keeping with Melchizedek.

St Paul formulates very clearly the essence of the apostolic and priestly ministry. Confronting the disputes that existed in the Church of Corinth between the different factions that adhered to different Apostles, he asks: What then is an Apostle? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants, each according to what the Lord has assigned them (cf. 1 Cor 3: 5). "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor 4: 1-2). In Jerusalem, in the last week of his life, Jesus himself spoke in two parables of those servants to whom the Lord entrusts his goods in the time of the world. Through them he has pointed out to you three characteristics of correct service, in which the image of the priestly ministry is also actualized. Lastly, let us take a brief look at these characteristics, to contemplate, through the eyes of Jesus himself, the task that you, dear friends, are called to take on at this moment.

The first characteristic which the Lord requires of his servant is fidelity. He has been entrusted with a great good that does not belong to him. The Church is not our Church but his Church, the

Church of God. The servant must account for how he has managed the good that has been entrusted to him. We do not bind people to us; we do not seek power, prestige or esteem for ourselves. We lead men and women toward Jesus Christ, hence toward the living God. In so doing, we introduce them into truth and into freedom, which derives from truth. Fidelity is altruism and, in this very way, liberating for the minister himself and for all who are entrusted to him. We know how in civil society and often also in the Church things suffer because many people on whom responsibility has been conferred work for themselves rather than for the community, for the common good. With a few strokes the Lord sketches an image of the wicked servant, who begins by grovelling and beating the workers, thereby betraying the essence of his responsibility. In Greek, the word for "fidelity" coincides with the word for "faith". The fidelity of the servant of Jesus Christ also consists precisely in the fact that he does not attempt to adapt faith to the fashions of the times. Christ alone has the words of eternal life and we must bring these words to the people. They are the most precious good that has been entrusted to us. There is nothing sterile or static about such fidelity; it is creative. The master rebuked the servant who, attempting to avoid all risk, had buried the money given to him in the ground. With this apparent fidelity, the servant had in reality set aside the good of his master to dedicate himself exclusively to his own affairs. Fidelity is not fear but rather is inspired by love and by its dynamism. The master praises the servant who has invested his goods profitably. Faith demands to be passed on: it was not given to us merely for ourselves, for the personal salvation of our own souls, but for others, for this world and for our time. We must bring faith into this world so that it may become in it a living force; in order to increase God's presence in the world.

The second characteristic that Jesus asks of the servant is prudence. Here it is necessary first to eliminate a misunderstanding. Prudence is something other than shrewdness. Prudence, according to the Greek philosophical tradition, is the first of the cardinal virtues. It indicates the primacy of the truth which, through "prudence", becomes a criterion for our action. Prudence demands humble, disciplined and watchful reason that does not let itself be blinded by prejudices; it does not judge according to desires and passions but rather seeks the truth, even though it may prove uncomfortable. Prudence means searching for the truth and acting in conformity with it. The prudent servant is first and foremost a man of truth and a man of sincere reason. God, through Jesus Christ, has opened wide for us the window of the truth which, before our own mere forces, often remains narrow and only partially transparent. In Sacred Scripture and in faith in the Church God shows us the essential truth about man, which impresses the right orientation upon our action. Thus, the first cardinal virtue of the priest as minister of Jesus Christ consists in letting himself be moulded by the truth that Christ shows us. In this way we become truly reasonable people, who judge on the basis of the whole and not on chance details. Let us not allow ourselves to be guided by what we see through the small window of our personal astuteness, but, rather, let us look at the world and at human beings through the large window that Christ has opened to us on the whole truth and thus recognize what truly counts in life.

The third characteristic of which Jesus speaks in the parables of the servant is goodness: "Good

and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25: 21, 23). What is meant by the characteristic of "goodness" can become clear to us if we think of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man. This man had addressed Jesus calling him "Good Teacher" and was given the surprising answer: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10: 17 f.). Only God is good in the full sense. He is the Good, the Good par excellence, Goodness personified. In a creature in man being good is therefore necessarily based on a profound interior orientation towards God. Goodness increases in inner union with the living God. Goodness presupposes in particular a living communion with God who is Good, a growing inner union with him. And in fact, from who else could one learn true goodness if not from the One who loved us to the end, to the very end (cf. Jn 13: 1). We become good servants through our living relationship with Jesus Christ. Only if our life is lived in dialogue with him; only if his being, his characteristics enter into us and shape us can we become truly good servants.

In the Church's calendar the Holy Name of Mary is commemorated today. In Mary who was and is totally united with her Son, Christ those amidst the darkness and sufferings of this world have found the face of the Mother who gives us the courage to go on. In the Western tradition, the name "Mary" was translated with "Star of the Sea". The title expresses exactly this experience: how often does the story which we are living appear like a dark sea whose waves pound threateningly against the small vessel of our life. At times, the night seems impenetrable. Often we can be under the impression that evil alone has power and that God is infinitely remote.

We often glimpse only from afar the great Light, Jesus Christ who has overcome death and evil. Yet then we see very near that light which is kindled when Mary says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord". We see the bright light of goodness that emanates from her. In the goodness with which she met and continually meets the needs of the great and small aspirations of numerous men and women, we recognize the goodness of God himself in a very human way. With his goodness he brings to the world ever anew Jesus Christ, hence the great Light of God. He gave us his Mother as our own Mother that we might learn from her to say the "yes" that makes us become good.

Dear friends, at this moment let us pray the Mother of the Lord for you, that she may always lead you towards her Son, the source of all goodness. And let us pray that you may become faithful servants, prudent and good, and thus that you may one day be able to hear the Lord of history speak these words: "Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master". Amen.

