



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATION IN ST. PETER'S BASILICA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

24 June 1979

1. "Et tu puer propheta Altissimi vocaberis."

"And you child, will be called the prophet of the Most High." (Lk 1:17.)

These words speak of today's Saint. With these words the priest Zechariah greeted his own son, after having regained the power of speech. With these words he greeted his son, to whom, by his will and to the surprise of the whole family, he gave the name John. Today the Church recalls these events, celebrating the solemnity of the birth of *St John the Baptist*.

It could also be called *the day of the call* of John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth of Ain-Karim, to be the last prophet of the Old Covenant; to be the Messenger and immediate Forerunner of the Messiah: Jesus Christ.

For he, who comes into the world in such unusual circumstances, already brings the divine call with him. This call comes from the plan of God himself, from his salvific love, and it is written in the man's history right from the first moment of conception in his mother's womb. All the circumstances of this conception, as well as the circumstances of John's birth at Ain-Karim, indicate an unusual call.

"Praeibis ante faciem Domini parare vias eius."

"You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." (Lk 1:76.)

We know that John the Baptist answered this call with his whole life. We know that he *remained*

faithful to it until his last breath. And he breathed his last in prison by order of Herod, as a result of the wish of Salome who acted on the instigation of her revengeful mother Herodias.

But the liturgy today does not mention all that, reserving it for another day. Today the liturgy bids us *rejoice just at the birth* of the Forerunner of the Lord. It bids us thank God for the call of John the Baptist.

2. When on this day, my dear Deacons and candidates for the priesthood, you present yourselves in St Peter's Basilica in Rome, all of us wish to rejoice too at your call to further participation in Christ's priesthood.

God has written the mystery of this call in the heart of each of you. We can repeat with the Prophet: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." (Jer 31:3.)

At a certain moment in life you became aware of this *divine call*. And you began to start on your way, you began to walk towards its fulfilment. The way to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which you receive from my hands today, passes through a series of stages and environments; to this belong your home, the years of elementary and secondary school as well as higher studies, the circle of friends, parish life. First and foremost, however, along this way is the *ecclesiastical Seminary*, to which each of us goes to find a definitive answer to the question regarding his call to the priesthood. Each of us goes there in order that, finding this answer in a more and more mature way, he can prepare, at the same time, thoroughly and systematically, for the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Today all these experiences are already behind you. You no longer ask, like that young man in the Gospel, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17). The Master has already helped you to *find the answer*. You present yourselves in order that the Church may stamp her sacramental seal on this answer.

3. This seal is stamped by means of the whole liturgy of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It is stamped by the Bishop, who acts with the power of the *Holy Spirit* and in communion with his Presbyterium.

The power of the Holy Spirit is indicated and transmitted by the laying-on of hands, accompanied first by silence and then by prayer. As a sign of the transfer of this power to *your young hands*, they will be *anointed* with the *holy Chrism* to be worthy of celebrating the Eucharist. Human hands cannot celebrate in any other way than in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To celebrate the Eucharist means gathering the People of God and constructing the Church in her fullest identity.

The moment we are living here together is of great importance both for each of you and for the whole Church.

The Church has prayed for each of these persons called who receive the sacramental seal of the Priesthood today. *The Church wishes* each of you to build her up with your own priesthood, with your own service, which—through the power obtained from Christ—"gathers and does not scatter" (cf. Mt 12:30).

4. Today, too, the Church prays. Your parents pray, your families and the circles with which your lives have been bound up so far, your seminaries, your dioceses, your Religious Congregations.

Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest who has called each of you as workers for his harvest, *that you may persevere in this harvest until the end.*

Like John, son of Zechariah and of Elizabeth of Ain-Karim, whose father said on the day of his birth, "Et tu puer propheta Altissimi vocaberis" (Lk 1:76).

May your perseverance be the fruit of the prayers we raise today. Persevere as prophets of the Almighty! Persevere as priests of Jesus Christ!

Yield abundant fruit. Amen.

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