



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 13 May 2001

1. *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13: 35).*

The Gospel for the Fifth Sunday in the Easter Season takes us back to the intimacy of the Upper Room. There Christ, during the Last Supper, instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Priesthood of the New Covenant, and bequeathed to his disciples the "new commandment" of love. We relive today the intense spiritual atmosphere of that extraordinary hour. The Lord's words to his disciples are addressed particularly to you, dear candidates for the priesthood, who are invited to receive his testament of love and service this morning.

We gather around you with affection. Close to you first of all are your relatives and friends, to whom I extend my most cordial greeting. The whole diocesan community of Rome, in which you carried out your formation, is gathered round you in spirit. The rectors and directors of formation of the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary, of the Almo Collegio Capranica, of the *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary, of the Seminary of the Oblates Sons of Our Lady of Divine Love, of the *Identes Missionary* Institute and of the Institute of the *Sons of St Anne*.

With special recognition I turn to those who have supervised your formation. The Cardinal Vicar spoke on their behalf at the beginning of this celebration. Through him, to whom I am deeply grateful, I would like to extend my warm gratitude to those in the Diocese who actively work in the vocational field.

2. *"Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified" (Jn 13: 31).*

While the liturgy urges us to dwell in the Upper Room in interior contemplation, let us once again listen to the Evangelist John who, ever attentive to the echoes of Christ's heart, cites the words he spoke after Judas Iscariot went out. Jesus speaks of the glory that the Father and the Son render to each other in the Easter mystery.

Dear deacons, today Christ invites you to enter into his glory and not to seek any other glory outside of it. For you too, *this is a decisive "hour"*. Indeed, ordination is the moment when Christ, through consecration in the Holy Spirit, associates you in a special way with his priesthood for the world's salvation. Each of you is chosen to glorify God *in persona Christi Capitis*. Like Christ and united with him, you *will glorify God and will be glorified by him*, offering yourselves for the world's salvation (cf. *Jn* 6: 51), loving to the end the persons whom the Father entrusts to you (cf. *Jn* 13: 3) and washing one another's feet (cf. *Jn* 13: 14).

The Lord presents *his commandment* to you in a new way: "as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (*Jn* 13: 34). It is *a gift and a commandment* for you: a gift of Christ's yoke that is easy and light (cf. *Mt* 11: 30); a commitment always to take this yoke upon yourselves first, humbly becoming models for the flock (cf. *1 Pt* 5: 3) entrusted to you by the Good Shepherd. You must constantly turn to him for help. You must always be inspired by his example.

3. Today, thinking back to the rich experience of the Jubilee Year, I would like once again to present to you symbolically the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, which outlines the Church's path in this new period of history. It is up to you to guide the steps of the Christian people with generous dedication, specifically taking into account two important areas of pastoral commitment: "starting afresh from Christ" (*ibid.*, nn. 29-41) and being "witnesses to Love" (*ibid.*, nn. 42-57). In this second field, marked by communion and charity, what is decisive is the "Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit", by encouraging "all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life" (*ibid.*, n. 46).

This is "*vocational promotion*" in its broadest and most fundamental sense, which must be vast and widely distributed among all members of the community. It is a matter of increasingly awakening and fostering a "vocational mentality", which is expressed in a personal and community style based on listening and the discernment of a generous response to God who calls. Dear candidates to the priesthood, your vocations are also the fruit of the Church's prayer, as well as of the assiduous and patient work of so many labourers of the Lord's harvest, who have hoed, sown and cared for the ground, for you too. Your perseverance is linked to this spiritual solidarity, which must never be lacking in the Church. For this reason, I would like here to thank all who, in silence and with their daily thoughts, offer their prayer and suffering for priests and for vocations.

4. Paul and Barnabas "returned to Lystra, to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to remain strong in the faith, and saying to them that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (*Acts* 14: 21-22). In a few words here is the call of

the Christian community, "to remain strong in the faith", in the face of trials and many tribulations, necessary in order to "enter the kingdom of God" (*Acts* 14: 21-22).

Dear ordinands, in the awareness of your mission, strive for holiness and spread love. Be first and foremost "*in love with the Church*", the Church on earth and that in heaven, looking to her with faith and love, despite the spots and wrinkles that can mark her human face. In her, may you see "the holy city, the new Jerusalem", which as the Apostle says in the Book of Revelation, is "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her bridegroom" (*Rv* 21: 2).

The Acts of the Apostles stress the bonds the missionaries have with the community. *The community is the vital environment from which they set out and to which they return*: from it they receive, so to speak, the incentive, and they bring back to it the experience they have lived, recognizing the signs of God's action in the mission. The priest is not the man of his own personal initiatives; he is the minister of the Gospel in the name of the Church. His apostolic activity takes its origin from the Church and returns to the Church.

5. Dear new ordinands, may you never lack the prayerful *support of the community*. Paul and Barnabus "had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled" (*Acts* 14: 26). Today, dear friends, you too are "commended to the grace of the Lord" for the mission you must carry out in the Church: to be stewards of Christ the Priest and Shepherd among his People. The community in Rome is praying for you. May the holy Apostles Peter and Paul intercede for you. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salus Populi Romani*, Mother of Priests, intercede for you.

Supported and encouraged by the communion of deep prayer, set out! Put out into the deep with courage, your sails filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit. In this way you will rejoice for all that the Lord achieves through you (cf. *Acts* 14: 27) and will experience even in the midst of trials and difficulties the greatness and joy of your mission. So be it!