



The Holy See

MASS WITH THE BISHOP AND THE PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF AOSTA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 20 July 2001

1. *"What shall I render to the Lord for what he has given me? I will raise the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord"* (resp. Psalm).

The words of the responsorial Psalm, which we have just heard, are well suited to this Eucharistic liturgy, which I have the joy of celebrating with you, dear priests of the Diocese of Aosta. I greet each of you, thanking you for coming to Les Combes, where I am about to conclude my wonderful stay in the mountains of the Val d'Aosta. I want to greet your Bishop and thank him for his helpful presence, which I have very much appreciated. I greet the Salesian Community which has generously received me in this house. I renew my gratitude to all those who have contributed these days to make my stay a pleasant one. For each of you I offer to the Lord this Eucharistic celebration.

2. *"I will offer you a sacrifice of praise"* (*ibid.*).

The Eucharist is the *sacrifice of praise par excellence*. Every time we celebrate it, we offer to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit the sacrifice pleasing to him, for the salvation of the world.

The priest's life and mission are closely linked to the accomplishment of this Eucharistic sacrifice.

Indeed, it could be said that the priest is called to become completely one with it, in order to become himself a sacrifice of praise. At this time, I think of the multitude of holy priests, who sacrificed themselves with Christ in the service of the Christian people. I think of those who spread the beautiful fragrance of Christ in this land of yours, serving St Anselm's Church to which you belong. "[Their] vows to the Lord [they] fulfilled before all his people" (*ibid.*).

3. Today's Gospel, taken from St Matthew, helps us to deepen our grasp of this truth when it reports the Lord's celebrated comment to the Pharisees: "If you had known what this means, *I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*" (Mt 12,7).

In fact, the mystery of *divine mercy*, which is revealed and fulfilled in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God is made present in the *Eucharist*. His sacrifice, which he, the Priest of the new and eternal Covenant offered to the Father and commanded to be perpetuated in the Eucharistic Memorial, is not fulfilled according to the old law but according to the Spirit, and brings about humanity's redemption because it realizes God's merciful plan.

Our priestly service and our entire life - through the goodness of the Lord who called us - also fit into the pattern of the same mystery. Christ's minister is a minister of his sacrifice and of his mercy: this is the priest as Jesus himself wanted him, indissolubly bound up with the two sacraments, the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

4. Dear Brothers, spiritually presenting to you the *Letter* which I wrote *to the Priests* of the whole world for Holy Thursday this year, I pray particularly for you and for all who work in this diocese. May the experience of divine mercy sanctify you and make you generous ministers of pardon and reconciliation.

All is grace! And so in a special way is the life of the Priest, minister of divine grace and for this reason called to "live the gift of the ministry with a sense of endless thanksgiving" (*Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 2001, n. 10).

Dear priests, do not be afraid to devote your time and energy to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Now more than ever the People of God need to rediscover the sacrament in its sober liturgical dignity, as the ordinary means of obtaining the remission of grave sins and also for its beneficial "humanizing" mission (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 12-13). May the saintly Curé d'Ars be your model and your guide.

May our Lady, Mother of Mercy, watch over you and your ministry. I entrust all of you and your communities to her. For my part, I assure you of my constant remembrance in prayer, so that each day you may repeat with a thankful heart: "*What shall I render to the Lord for what he has given me? I will raise the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord*".