



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ENGLISH SPEAKING PRIESTS AND DEACONS

Thursday, 24 April 1981

Dearly beloved in Christ,

1. After his resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ returns to the company of his disciples. He is happy to be in their midst once again. He shows his deep personal interest in them; he calls them “friends” and eats with them. It is for the third time, as Saint John points out in this morning’s Gospel, that he shows himself to his disciples. In so doing Jesus *manifests the new life and power of his Resurrection*.

2. For us today it is important to note that the disciples to whom Jesus appeared – Peter and Thomas, Nathanael, James and John – were now *his priests*; they were among those who had been with him a short time before, at the Last Supper; they were among those who had heard him say: “Do this in remembrance of me”^[1]. By these words, according to the constant teaching of the Church and the solemn declaration of the Council of Trent, Jesus conferred the priesthood on his Apostles and ordained that they and their successors in the priesthood should offer the Sacrifice of his body and blood^[2].

3. This morning *our celebration of the Lord’s Resurrection is linked with the celebration of the sacred Priesthood*. We honour this priesthood in the Risen Lord, in Jesus Christ himself. We honour it in Archbishop White and in the other members of his year, who are commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of their ordination. And thus we honour this priesthood of the New Testament as it has been transmitted through unbroken apostolic succession, and as it will be communicated in the near future to the new deacons present here today – the sacrificial priesthood that will perpetuate the Paschal Mystery and fortify the Church until Christ comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

4. The priesthood that we are celebrating re-enacts sacramentally in the Eucharist the death and glorification of the Lord. *The Eucharist is the proclamation of Christ's Resurrection in its highest form*, just as it is the source and summit of all evangelisation[3]. And all the efforts of those who share Christ's priesthood must be directed to announcing the mystery of the Risen Saviour.

Whether it seems expedient or not according to the standards of the world, the priesthood of the Catholic Church must incessantly proclaim the doctrine of the Resurrection. In order to do this, it has been marvellously endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. And through this power of the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Resurrection has the same capacity today to elicit faith and to convert hearts as when it was made by the Apostles Peter and John. The name of the Crucified and Risen Jesus must be held up before the world. In the name of Jesus, the Church offers to all individuals and peoples an invincible hope – a hope that can overcome all sadness, take away all pessimism, conquer all sin and finally overcome death itself. The Risen Christ gives hope to the world. In the name of Jesus there is the hope of salvation, resurrection and newness of life. Indeed, “of all the names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved”[4].

5. After having passed a number of years in the priestly ministry – a ministry exercised in different ways as the Church of God and his providence have disposed – there is not one of us concelebrating this Mass today who can imagine a joy in our priesthood greater than *the joy of repeatedly proclaiming the Paschal Mystery in its sacramental re-enactment* in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Nowhere is Jesus Christ more strikingly the Lord of life than in the Eucharist, from which his saving and life-giving power goes forth over the earth. Through the Eucharist, the victory and triumph of Christ's Resurrection are communicated to humanity craving for reconciliation, healing and life.

6. Dear jubilarians: the sacramental proclamation of Christ's Paschal Mystery does not make up the whole of your ministry in the Church, but it is certainly its most important aspect. The Mass is the centre of your priestly lives. It is the most dynamic and effective contribution you can make to the good of God's people: by dying, Jesus himself has destroyed death and by rising he has restored his people to life. And this is communicated through the Eucharist, which is possible only through the priesthood.

These essential reflections do not minimize other aspects of your priestly ministry; they do not make you less available for the many services that God's people ask of you. But *everything else takes its perspective from its relationship to the Eucharist* and its relationship to the new life that Jesus lives through his Resurrection for the glory of his Father.

And so, as you look back to the happy day of your ordination and recall your parents and families

and all those who helped you to the priesthood, you must also look forward and think of all those who depend on you and who will be enabled, through your faithful ministry, “to walk in newness of life”^[5]. For you, my brother priests, this is therefore a day for thanksgiving and for renewed fidelity. For you, dear deacons, this is an occasion that should elicit trust, generosity and prayer. And for the whole Church, represented here also by your families and friends, it is an hour of joy – a joy that we all share with Mary, the Queen of Heaven, who rejoices in the Easter victory of her Risen Son, our Lord and High Priest Jesus Christ. Amen.

[1] *Luc.* 22, 19.

[2] Cfr. Sess. 22, cap.1 can. 2.

[3] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

[4] *Act.* 4, 12.

[5] *Rom.* 6, 4.