



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE LEO XIV
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING OF PRIESTS
PROMOTED BY THE DICASTERY FOR THE CLERGY**

*Auditorium of Via della Conciliazione, Rome
Thursday, 26 June 2025*

[Multimedia]

Let us begin with the Sign of the Cross, since we are all here because Christ, who died and rose again, has given us life and called us to serve.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you!

*Dear brothers in the priesthood, dear brother priests,
Dear formators, seminarians, vocation directors, friends in the Lord!*

It is a source of great joy for me to be here with you today. In the heart of this Holy Year, we want to bear witness together that we can be joyful priests because Christ has called us, and Christ has made us his friends (cf. *Jn 15:15*). This is a grace that we want to accept with gratitude and responsibility.

I would like to thank Cardinal Lazzaro and the staff of the Dicastery for the Clergy for their generous and competent service. Theirs is an extensive and important work, often carried out in silence and with discretion, which produces rich fruits of communion, formation and renewal.

This occasion of fraternal sharing by priests from many nations can enable us to profit from a wealth of practical experiences and thus promote creativity, co-responsibility and communion in the Church. In this way, the seeds sown with great effort in many different communities can become a source of light and encouragement for everyone.

Jesus' words, "I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15), are not just an expression of the affection he felt for his disciples, but a real key to the meaning of our priestly ministry. The priest is a friend of the Lord, called to a personal and trusting relationship with him, nourished by the word, the celebration of the sacraments, and daily prayer. Friendship with Christ is the spiritual foundation of the ordained ministry, the ultimate reason for our celibacy and the source of our daily commitment to the service of the ecclesial community. It sustains us in times of trial and enables us to renew each day the "yes" we said to the Lord at the beginning of our vocation.

Based on those words of Jesus, I would like, dear friends, to draw three particular implications for the training of future priests.

First, *formation is a process of growth in relationship*. To become friends of Christ involves training in how to relate to others, not merely the acquisition of practical skills. Priestly formation is about more than learning concepts alone; it is a journey of growth in intimacy with the Lord. It engages the entire person – heart, mind and freedom – in order to shape him in the image of the Good Shepherd. Only those who live as friends of Christ, and are imbued with his Spirit, can preach with conviction, console with compassion and lead with wisdom. This includes learning to listen patiently to others, meditative prayer, and the cultivation of a rich and rightly ordered inner life.

Second, *fraternity is an essential element of priestly life*. Becoming friends of Christ entails living as brothers with our fellow priests and with our bishops, not as competitors or in an individualistic way. Formation should help forge solid bonds within the presbyterate as an expression of a synodal Church in which all of us grow together in sharing the labours and joys of ministry. For how could we, as ministers, be builders of living communities, unless we first experience a genuine spirit of fraternity among ourselves?

Finally, *forming priests who are friends of Christ means forming men*, men who are capable of loving, listening, praying and serving together. That is why special attention should be given to training seminary formators, because the effectiveness of their work depends primarily on the example of life and communion that they themselves give. The fact that seminaries exist is a reminder that the formation of future ordained ministers cannot be carried out in isolation. It demands the involvement of all those friends of the Lord who live as missionary disciples in the service of the People of God.

Here, I would also like to add a word about vocations. Despite the signs of a crisis in the life and mission of priests, God continues to call, and he remains faithful to his promises. Yet there need to be adequate spaces where his voice can be heard. There is a need for settings and forms of youth ministry centred on the Gospel, for this is where the call to total gift of self can emerge and mature. Do not be afraid to present young people with demanding and liberating possibilities for their future! As we look to the young men and women who even now are generously responding to the Lord's call, may all of us feel the desire to renew our "yes," and to rediscover the beauty of being

missionary disciples of Christ the Good Shepherd.

Dear friends, we are meeting on the eve of the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is from this “burning bush” that our vocation originates; it is from this source of grace that we want to let ourselves be transformed.

Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Dilexit Nos* is a precious gift for the whole Church, but in a special way for us priests. It directly challenges us, for it asks us to combine mysticism and social commitment, contemplation and action, silence and speaking out. The times in which we live also challenge us: many people appear to have drifted away from the faith, yet deep inside, especially in the case of the young, there continues to be a thirst for the infinite and for salvation. If there is a widespread experience of the “absence” of God, it is nonetheless true that every human being is made for him, and the Father’s plan is that Christ be the heart of the world.

That is why we want to recover, together, a missionary spirit: a missionary outreach that courageously and lovingly proposes the Gospel of Jesus. Through our pastoral activity, the Lord himself cares for his flock, gathers those who are scattered, tends those who are wounded and supports those who are disheartened. When we imitate the example of the Master, we grow in faith and thus become credible witnesses of the vocation we have received. When someone believes, it shows: the joy of a priest mirrors his closeness to Christ, who sustains him in his mission and ministry.

Dear brothers in the priesthood, I thank those of you who have come from far away! I thank each of you for your daily efforts, especially in centers of formation, in existential peripheries and in difficult and at times dangerous places. As we think of all those priests who gave their lives in sacrifice to others, even to the point of shedding their blood, let us now renew our desire to devote ourselves unreservedly to an apostolate of compassion and joy.

Thank you for what you are! You remind everyone how good it is to be a priest, and that every call from the Lord is first and foremost a call to share in his joy. We are not perfect, but we are friends of Christ, brothers to one another and sons of his loving Mother Mary, and this is enough for us.

Let us now turn to the Lord Jesus, to his merciful Heart, afire with love for every person. Let us implore the grace to be missionary disciples and shepherds as he desires: by seeking those who have gone astray, by serving the poor and by humbly guiding those entrusted to our care. May the Heart of Jesus inspire our projects, transform our hearts, and renew us in our mission. With great affection I give you my blessing and assure all of you of my prayers.

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To conclude, let us take a moment to pray together. A very brief moment, but as I said before, a

very important one. I want to stress the importance of the spiritual life of priests. So many times, when we need help, we need to look for a good guide, a spiritual director, a good confessor. None of us here is alone. Even if you are working in the remotest mission, you are never alone! Try to live what [Pope Francis](#) liked to call “closeness”: closeness with the Lord, closeness with your bishop or religious superior, and closeness among yourselves, because you really need to be friends and brothers. Cherish the rich experience of walking together in the knowledge that we are called to be disciples of the Lord. We have a great mission and together we can carry it out. Always count on God’s grace and my own closeness; together, we can truly be his voice in the world. Thank you!

And so, let us pray together: *Our Father...*

And to Mary our Mother: *Hail Mary...*

[Blessing]

Best wishes to you all! May God bless you always!