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Ordination homily of Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei

On May 31, Bishop Echevarría ordained 26 faithful of Opus Dei to the priesthood at the Basilica of San Eugenio in Rome. His homily at the Ordination Mass follows.

06/03/2003

My dear brothers and sisters. Most beloved deacons.

We celebrate the Ascension of the Lord, a solemnity of particular joy because it allows us to contemplate Jesus Christ who, proclaimed by the great multitude of the heavenly hosts, gloriously enters into heaven. We also, as members of His mystical Body, “live with the hope that one day we will be united with Him in glory.” This certainty lessens the lingering sadness that is characteristic of this feast. When they realized that their physical separation from Jesus was now definitive, after having lived for three years by His side, the Apostles felt disoriented and confused, standing with their gazes fixed on the Lord as he was leaving them. They stood thus until an angel directed this question to them: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall come in the same way as you have seen him going up to heaven.”

Afterwards, the Apostles “returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

Until he returns in glory, Jesus continues to be among us in various ways through the power of the Holy Spirit. Vatican II teaches that the Lord “is present with his power in the Sacraments in such a way that when someone baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes. He is present in his word, such that when the Holy Scripture is read in the Church, it is he who speaks. He is present when the Church prays and sings psalms, as he himself promised: ‘When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst’ (Mt 18:20).” And he is primarily present, “in the Sacrifice of the Mass, whether in the person of the minister..., or above all in the Eucharistic species.” I would like to refer briefly to this sacramental presence in order to illustrate the significance of the liturgical celebration in which this

group of deacons of the Prelature is going to receive priestly ordination.

John Paul II's recent encyclical on the Holy Eucharist places special emphasis upon a central point of Catholic doctrine: "When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection, the central event of salvation is truly made present.... This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ accomplished it and returned to the Father *only after he had left us with the means whereby we might participate in it*, just as if we had been present there ourselves." If we meditate deeply upon these words, trying to grasp their full significance, we will realize that this is something truly astonishing. We have no reason to be envious of the Apostles: we too, men and women of the 21st century, by participating in the Holy Mass with lively faith and

sincere piety, enter into direct contact with the death and resurrection of the Lord. The salvific action of the Incarnate Word, carried out two thousand years ago, which rescued us from sin and made us sons and daughters of God, is made sacramentally present in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. As St. Josemaría used to say, “the Holy Mass is a real, actual, and propitiatory sacrifice.” By being real and actual, we have to make the effort each day to put ourselves more and more into it, thus converting our entire day into an offering that is holy, pure, and immaculate to God the Father, with Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Because it is propitiatory, we have to experience real sorrow for all of our negligence, for not having known how, on many occasions, to make the Mass the center of our lives.

Any expression of gratitude to Jesus Christ for this inestimable gift will

always be insufficient. As the Pope reminds us, we ought always to live prostrated, “in adoration before this Mystery – a grand Mystery, a Mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus do for us? In the Eucharist Jesus truly shows us a love that goes ‘unto the end’ (Jn 13:1), a love that knows no bounds.”

Thus, precisely to ensure the real and actual presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross in the world until the end of time, Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Thanks to this sacrament the Lord elects, consecrates, and sends forth certain men so that they might represent him before the rest of humanity. When they preach the Word of God or administer the Sacraments, these priests act *in persona Christi*. These words – as the Holy Father writes – mean, “more than ‘in His name’, or ‘in the place’ of Christ. ‘*In persona*’ refers to the priest’s specific and

sacramental identification with the 'High and Eternal Priest,' who is the Author and the Subject of His own sacrifice, in that which He cannot be substituted by anyone."

Priests are living instruments of the Lord's Holy Humanity; He is the one who from heaven acts through them, and in a very special way in the Eucharist and in Confession. St.

Josemaría used to enjoy considering this reality. Here is one of his reflections: "I arrive at the altar and the first thing that I think is:

Josemaría, you are not Josemaría...: you are Christ. All of us priests are Christ. I lend the Lord my voice, my hands, my body, my soul: I give Him everything. He is the one who says, 'this is my Body, this is my Blood,' He is the one who consecrates. If not, I wouldn't be able to do anything. In that moment the divine Sacrifice of Calvary is renewed in an unbloody way. It is in this way that I am there

present ‘*in persona Christi*,’ taking Christ’s place. The priest thus disappears as an individual person.”

I now address myself to you, my deacon sons. In the meetings that we have had these past months of preparation for the priesthood, I have spoken to you about our Father as a model of a completely priestly existence. You know many things about his life that have to help you to brand with fire in your souls his wondrous example of priestly behavior and to convert you into most faithful instruments of God in the work of sanctifying souls.

Now I would like to bring to your recollection one of these significant aspects of St. Josemaría’s life, one that is very closely united to the visible representation of Christ as Priest, Teacher, and Shepherd, which I entrust to each of you as a mission. What I want to emphasize is the

necessity to be, in every moment, a living, transparent image of Christ, in such a way that the faithful – looking at you, listening to your preaching, contemplating your behavior – might discover the holy and merciful face of the Redeemer.

I repeat this to you with the words of St. Josemaría: “it is asked of the priest that he not be an obstacle to Christ’s presence in him, especially in those moments in which he realizes the Sacrifice of the Body and of the Blood, and when, in the name of God, he forgives sin in the individual sacrament of confession. The ministry of these two sacraments is so important in the mission of the priest that everything else ought to revolve around it.” The goal is high, but it is not unreachable because the Lord grants you his grace in abundance. This certainty will give you always an unshakable peace. Consider for a moment the teaching

of St. Gregory of Nyssa about the priest: “Yesterday and the day before yesterday, he was just one more amid the congregation; suddenly, he appears as guide, teacher, master of piety, minister of the holy mysteries. All of this has come about without any change in his bodily appearance or external aspect. Apparently, he continues to be what he was. But, in virtue of an invisible force, a particular grace, his soul is changed into something greater.” In addition, you can count on a profound intellectual and spiritual preparation and, even more importantly, the prayer of thousands of people.

It is very natural that each one of us ask the Good Shepherd to send many holy priests to the Church. In the first place we pray for the Holy Father who with immense generosity spends his energies in the service of the Church and of all mankind; for the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, for the

bishops, and for all other ordained ministers. And you, parents and siblings of these new priests, may you thank God for the affection that he has shown towards your family: strive to correspond to such a great predilection by renewing your Christian lives. I extend to all of you my warmest greetings.

The Virgin was associated in a singular way with the Sacrifice of the Cross. On Calvary, in the person of St. John, she received the mission to be the mother of each one of her Son's disciples and, in a most particular way, of priests. She, "with her entire life next to Christ, and not simply on Calvary, made her own *the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist*" (John Paul II). If we speak to her with the piety of children, if we pray well the rosary, contemplating the mysteries, especially in this year dedicated to this Marian devotion, we will enter – as the Holy Father teaches – "*into the*

school of Mary, a woman of the eucharist, and we will progress more and more in love of God and of the others for God. Amen.

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