

Ordination homily of the Prelate of Opus Dei

"Be instruments of unity.... Bring many souls closer to God." The homily of Bishop Javier Echevarría at the ordination of 42 new priests in Rome on May 21, 2005.

05/23/2005

My dearest sons who will soon become priests; dear brothers and sisters:

I address myself to you with the greeting of Saint Paul to the Corinthians that we have just heard: "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13, 13).

Today, solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, is a great day in the Church. We celebrate and adore the highest mystery of our faith, the central mystery of Christian life, even more, the highest mystery of the life of every woman and of every man, all of whom are called to participate in the Life of God. This truth, which Christ has revealed to us, infinitely surpasses the intellectual capacity of all creatures, and constitutes "the fruit and end of our whole life" (St. Thomas Aquinas). As Saint Augustine states, "this is our complete joy, and there is no other greater: to enjoy the Blessed Trinity, in whose image we have been made.... This

contemplation is promised to us as the goal of all our actions and the eternal perfection of our joy.”

To the joy of this great feast is added the joy of the ordination of forty-two new priests. I cordially congratulate their families, and I assure you that you are present in a special way in our prayers. But you should also pray very much for the new priests: they need your prayers now more than ever. At the same time, we give thanks to God, who does not leave us without ministers of Christ, and we ask Him that they may be even more plentiful throughout the world.

The priest, man of the Eucharist

The spiritual wealth of the priesthood is enormous. Each priest, by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is configured in a special way to the High and Eternal Priest, and he is empowered to represent Him in a visible way before all in order to act

in Persona Christi Capitis, that is, as a living instrument of Christ, the Head of the Church.

I invite all of you to reflect briefly on some of the aspects that derive from this specific sacramental configuration with Christ; I am referring to the Eucharistic, ecclesiological, and Marian dimensions of the ministerial priesthood.

First, the Eucharistic dimension. As we were so often reminded by our beloved Pope John Paul II, the Eucharist and the priesthood were born together, in the Upper Room in Jerusalem the afternoon of Holy Thursday. For this reason —as he wrote in his last letter to priests a few weeks before his death— “all the more then must the life of a priest be shaped by the Eucharist.”

There is an indissoluble link between the priesthood and the Eucharist: the

priest is for the Eucharist and the Eucharist—which is the Bread of Life for all Christians—can only be consecrated by the Bishops and their collaborators, the priests. Thus, the Paschal Mystery of the death and resurrection of our Lord is made present, in a sacramental way, in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Benedict XVI has underlined this truth of faith from the very first moments of his Pontificate. Speaking of the “providential coincidence” of the beginning of his Petrine Ministry with the Year of the Eucharist he said: “The Eucharist makes constantly present the Risen Christ who continues to give himself to us, calling us to participate in the banquet of his Body and his Blood.”

Dear candidates for priestly ordination: always keep in mind that the gift and the task of consecrating the Eucharist, which our Lord is granting you today, carries with it a

great responsibility. At times the thought will come to your mind that you are only human, and it is true: we all are. But do not be afraid. God, who has called you, also offers you all his help so that you may be holy priests, that is, priests who are in love with Christ, dedicated to the salvation of souls, totally available for the needs of the apostolate.

Follow the example of Saint Josemaría, who liked to describe himself as "a priest of Jesus Christ", and also as "a sinner who is madly in love with Jesus Christ." Both are perfectly compatible, because —so our founder taught— the incomparable dignity of the priest "is a greatness which is on loan: it is completely compatible with my own littleness. I pray to God our Lord to give all of us priests the grace to perform holy things in a holy way, to reflect in every aspect of our lives the wonders of the greatness of God."

The Priest, builder of communion

If the Church "makes" the Eucharist through her priests, it is also true that the Church itself is "born" of the Eucharist, as John Paul II emphasized in his last encyclical. The ecclesiological dimension of the priesthood derives necessarily from its Eucharistic dimension. The priest is for the Eucharist in the Church and at the service of the Church. Without full communion with the Roman Pontiff and with his own Ordinary, the priest cannot provide a true ecclesial service. We find an important witness of this fact, which comes to us from the earliest times, in the liturgy of the Mass itself, where the Universal Church, the Roman Pontiff —her visible Head, as well as the local Bishop and all other Bishops in communion with the Holy See are always mentioned.

On this point I would like to recall, with gratitude to the Lord our God, the impressive manifestation of communion that we saw in Rome and throughout the world during these past weeks. The Church in all its components came together, first around John Paul II, in a farewell filled with emotion that accompanied his departure from this earth, then around Benedict XVI. During those days the Church showed herself more alive than ever, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. It is everyone's task —priests' in the first place—to make sure that this wonderful heritage does not dissipate, but rather becomes even stronger in the future. Great goods for the Church and for the whole world will come necessarily from a close communion, both affective and effective, of all Catholics with the Vicar of Christ.

Dear candidates, besides joyfully offering many prayers and sacrifices for the Roman Pontiff like all the faithful, you will have in your hands from now on specific means to strengthen this communion. Your conformation with Christ the Priest enables you to teach the Word of God with authority. Deepen constantly in the doctrine of the Church that you know well, first of all with the example of your complete fidelity to the Magisterium. In your specific case, the call of building communion in the Church has to be expressed in what Saint Josemaría called a “dominant passion” in *Opus Dei*: to love wholeheartedly the unity of the Prelature, as an expression of the unity of the Church, of which the Work is a small part. Therefore, you should be “instruments of unity” among individuals and in all the apostolic activities in which you participate. A great task awaits you, my children; and how efficacious

will be the service that you will lend the Church!

Another specific way that you as priests have to build communion is your joyful dedication —even when you are tired— to the ministry of Reconciliation that today is entrusted to you. This Sacrament, by reconciling with God and with the Church the faithful who acknowledge their sinfulness, and by increasing the grace in those who receive it worthily, brings about communion with God and with others. This must be another “dominant passion” for you: to bring many souls closer to God through the Holy Sacrament of Penance.

This recommendation applies to all of us. Do a great catechesis of Confession. Bring your friends, your relatives and your acquaintances to the Sacrament of divine mercy. You will make them happier and they too

will feel encouraged to bring other people to Confession.

Marian dimension of the priesthood

I want to speak now, though briefly, of the third dimension of the priesthood: its particular relation to Mary. Christ the Redeemer, in whose place we priests stand, is not an abstraction but a specific Person: he is the eternal Son of God, born in time of a specific woman, the Virgin Mary, whose blood runs through His veins. Being a Priest precisely in so far as he is man, Jesus has wanted to associate his Mother in the work of redemption. In fact, from the top of the Cross he addressed to the disciple those wonderful words: “behold your Mother”; and to Mary: “behold your son” (cf. John 19:26-27). Certainly every Christian is a son of Mary, but the priest is also Her son because of a new title: when Jesus addressed

himself to John, he was speaking to a man who had been endowed with priestly dignity the previous afternoon in the Upper Room.

Let us all meditate on the words of John Paul II, when he writes that “in the ‘memorial’ of Calvary [in the Holy Mass] all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently all that Christ did with regard to his Mother for our sake is also present....

“Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of

the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). Therefore, the special relationship of the priest with the Eucharist implies also a special relationship of the priest with Mary.

Some reflections of Saint Josemaría have a universal validity for all of us, but even more so during the month of Mary in this Year of the Eucharist. He wrote: "for me, the first Marian devotion —I like to see it so— is the Holy Mass.... Each day, when Christ comes down to the hands of the priest, his real presence among us is renewed, with his Body, with his Blood, with his Soul and with his Divinity: it is the same Body and the same Blood that he took from Mary's womb." I propose these reflections to all of you, and also to myself: let us seek to keep them very much in mind during the following weeks, as

we prepare for the solemnity of Corpus Christi.

Finally, I would like to transmit to you a thought of Benedict XVI taken from the homily he gave a few days ago, when he took possession of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, the See of the Bishop of Rome. The Pope reminds us that from the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the apostolic desires of the people of God are born and develop, and he adds: “In this mystery, Christ's love becomes permanently tangible among us. Here, again and again he gives himself. Here, again and again his heart is pierced; here he keeps his promise, the promise which, from the Cross, was to attract all things to himself.... Thanks to the Eucharist, the Church is reborn ever anew! The Church is none other than that network —the Eucharistic community!— within which all of us, receiving the same Lord, become one body and embrace all the world.”

Through the intercession of the
Mother of the Church, the Mother of
priests, the Mother of all Christians.
Amen.

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