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Homily at the ordination of priests (2008)

The Prelate of Opus Dei's homily to the priests, families and faithful attending the ordination of priests on May 24, 2008, in the basilica of San Eugenio in Rome.

05/28/2008

My dear brothers and sisters, dear ordinands:

1. Today we are celebrating here in the diocese of Rome the solemnity of

Corpus Christi. The joy the Church experiences on this great feast is strengthened by yet another reason to rejoice: the priestly ordination of thirty-six deacons of the Prelature of Opus Dei, from fifteen countries.

In the first reading of the Mass, taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, we listened once again to the words addressed by Moses to the people before entering into the promised land. The great leader of Israel recalls the wonders worked for them by the Lord: freeing them from slavery in Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, and above all their pilgrimage through the desert.

Remember how the Lord your God led you for forty years in the wilderness.

[1]

Remember! We too should frequently recall the gifts God has bestowed on us and give him thanks. Among these, there stands out today the gift

of these new priests. A gift, in the first place, to the Church and to all mankind; but also a gift to their families, who, with the ordination of their loved ones, receive yet another proof of God's special affection for them.

Naturally my gratitude is directed in the first place to the Most Holy Trinity, font of all gifts. But it is also directed to the families of the new priests, for their cooperation with the gift of God (a cooperation that shouldn't cease now) so that the seed of the priestly vocation might take root in the souls of these men. Let us continue praying for them and for all the Church's ministers, in the first place for Benedict XVI and the bishops in communion with him. Let us beseech Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, that he bring forth many priestly vocations all over the world. This petition is the responsibility of all the faithful, since the ministerial

priesthood is absolutely essential for the Church's life and mission in the world.

2. Let us return to Moses' words in the first reading. *Do not then forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery: who guided you through this vast and dreadful wilderness, a land of fiery serpents, scorpions, and thirsty ground where there was no water.*[2] Isn't this a description of our earthly pilgrimage as we travel towards our celestial dwelling place? We too have been brought out of the tyranny of sin through the sacraments of Baptism and Penance. We too have been strengthened by the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, to overcome the devil and sin, symbolized by the serpents and scorpions. We too have walked through a spiritually arid land, but God's grace, like heavenly dew, is always available to us. Indeed, as

Moses recalls, the Lord is the one who *brought you water from the hardest rock; who in this wilderness fed you with manna that your fathers had not known.*[3]

In that water from the rock, in that manna coming down from heaven, the Fathers of the Church recognized an announcement of the grace of the Holy Spirit, able to make fruitful the arid and parched earth. It is a foreshadowing of the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers us his Body and his Blood, true food and true drink for the salvation of our souls and of the whole world. Jesus himself, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, told those who asked him for material food: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.*[4]

As the sequence *Lauda Sion*, proper to this solemnity, expresses with special richness: *ecce panis angelorum, / factus cibus viatorum, / vere panis filiorum, / non mittendus canibus*. [5] Lo the angel's food is given / to the pilgrim who has striven. / See the children's bread from heaven / which on dogs may not be spent.

Let us give thanks to God with the prayer of praise found in the responsorial psalm: *Lauda, Ierusalem, Dominum; collauda Deum tuum, Sion*. [6] Let us glorify the Lord; let us thank him for all the marvels he has carried out for his people; and let us strive to prepare ourselves better every day to receive Holy Communion, through the frequent purification of our soul in the sacrament of Penance. Let us also formulate the resolution to carry out a constant apostolate of Confession and of the Eucharist.

3. I now would like to direct myself to you, my dear deacons, who in a few minutes will become priests of the new and definitive Covenant sealed on Calvary with the blood of Christ. To you, my sons, the Church entrusts the pastoral care of all the faithful, especially those in the Prelature and all who come to our apostolates seeking spiritual assistance. You will be dispensers of God's mysteries. With St. Josemaría, our beloved founder, I remind you that the priest is judge, doctor, teacher, father, and shepherd.

You will be *judges*, in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ. You will forgive sins in the sacrament of penance, "a tribunal of divine justice and especially of mercy." [7] As we have learned from St. Josemaría, always be available to administer this holy sacrament.

There you are also a *physician* of souls; you will cure spiritual illnesses, strengthen the weak, and direct countless people on the path to heaven. To fulfill this task effectively, I exhort you, with our Father, to act “with a motherly hand, with the almost infinite tenderness shown by our own mothers, when they were treating the hurts and injuries, big or little, resulting from our childhood games and falls.”[8]

You will be *teachers*, through your catechesis and preaching, which will be, as St. Josemaria said, one of your “dominant passions.” Foster the desire to make Christ’s doctrine known, always following faithfully the Church’s magisterium.

You will be *fathers* of souls. For the priest brings children of God to birth in the bosom of the Church, through Baptism; you give them divine life and you nourish this life in them

with the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. A priest can offer souls, in spiritual direction, the good advice of a mother and a father; and, at the moment of departing this world, he accompanies the body to the grave, in the hope of the resurrection of the flesh, while escorting the soul to its heavenly dwelling with his prayers.

You will be *shepherds*, like Christ, the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep. Thus, impelled by pastoral charity, always be ready to serve everyone, without demanding any rights, pouring yourselves out joyfully in the service of souls.

4. Before ending, I would like to make my own the recommendations of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during a priestly ordination that he conferred a few weeks ago.

“Dear ordinands,” the Pope said, “in the future you must always think

back to this moment, to this gesture that has nothing magical about it and yet is full of mystery, because this is the origin of your new mission. In that silent prayer the encounter between two freedoms comes into being: the freedom of God, who works through the Holy Spirit, and the freedom of man.... The Church, personified by the Bishop standing with his hands extended, asks the Holy Spirit to consecrate the candidate; the deacon, on his knees, receives the imposition of hands and entrusts himself to that mediation. All these gestures are important, but infinitely more important is the invisible, spiritual reality they express, a reality clearly evoked by the sacred silence that envelops everything, internal and external.”[9]

In a moment, I will place my hands on each of you, praying in silence. Then I will invoke the Paraclete in the prayer of consecration, by which

God will make you priests of Jesus Christ forever. Be assured that all those present, and many others throughout the world, are accompanying you with their prayers.

Let us unite ourselves wholeheartedly to the Holy Father's prayer for the Church in China; let us meditate on his words and ask our Lord to hear his petitions.

We entrust these brothers of ours to Mary, Mother of Christians and, in a special way, Mother of priests. May our Lady welcome them as her specially loved sons, just as she did St. John, the beloved disciple, beneath the Cross of Jesus. Amen.

1. Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi, First reading (*Deut* 8:2).

2.*Deut* 8:14-15.

3. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

4. *Jn* 6:51.

5. Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christi. Sequence *Lauda Sion*.

6. Roman Missal, Solemnity of Corpus Christ. Responsorial Psalm (*Ps* 147).

7. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 78.

8. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 158.

9. Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at an ordination of priests, April 27, 2008.