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Homily of Cardinal Lazarus You Heung- sik

Homily of the Prefect of the
Dicastery of the Clergy in the
priestly ordination of 25
faithful of Opus Dei on 20 May
2023.

05/20/2023

Brothers and sisters, dearest
ordinands:

A great event is taking place today:
Jesus is taking 25 men to make them
his instruments, his ministers!

Through you, Christ himself will speak; through your hands, he will absolve sins and reconcile the faithful to the Father; through you, he will repeat the words he spoke to his disciples: "This is my Body, which will be given up for you" and "this is my blood, which will be poured out for you and for many."

But it will not be you alone who will act — you would not be able to — but Christ who will act through you. And He does not make you His instruments only for a period of time, but forever, as we sang in the Psalm. A new union is established between you and Jesus today, which will never dissolve.

You will act amid the People of God *in persona Christi capitis*, in virtue of Christ, the Head of his Body, which is the Church. But Christ's way of acting as Head is very different: he does not command or dominate, but serves!

When I think of this, the image of the washing of the feet comes to mind: the Master and Lord becomes his disciples' servant. For me, this gesture reveals much about the ministerial priesthood.

Jesus gives his life and thus gives life to the new People, the new humanity. Strikingly, today's readings repeat this idea four times: "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep;" "I know my sheep [...] and I lay down my life for my sheep," in chapter 10 of St. John's Gospel, and "one has died for all," "He has died for all," in the Second Letter to the Corinthians.

Through the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the sacraments, and pastoral service, you are called to be a sign and instrument of this unreserved gift of Christ and how he offers himself to all.

It is a great call. The mission is being entrusted to you as a gratuitous gift, not a response to your merits. You are like the apostles described in the Acts of the Apostles: "chosen witnesses," chosen by God, not because you have earned it.

So we can affirm that something truly great is happening today, and it fills us with gratitude and joy toward the Father in Heaven. He has chosen to make you his instruments to serve his people!

Let us contemplate the gift of Christ, which will be conferred on you by the laying on of hands and the words of ordination. This gift commits you wholly.

In a short time I will hand you the chalice and paten, saying to each of you, "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, imitate the mystery you celebrate, model

your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross."

You are not only to celebrate the Eucharist but to *become Eucharist* yourselves, in a life offered entirely for your brothers and sisters. *Become Eucharist* so the People of God may be, as Cardinal Stephen Kim of Korea put it, "one great host in society," the presence of Christ's love until the end of time.

This is one of the commitments you are making today. I will ask you, "Do you resolve to be united more closely every day to Christ High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with him to consecrate yourselves to God for the salvation of all?" and you will answer, "I do." Then you will prostrate yourselves on the ground as the Litany of the Saints is sung in a gesture of complete surrender and abandonment. A few days ago, I told

you how, at that moment in my ordination, I gave myself to Christ crucified and abandoned so He could come alive in me. Since that moment, this has been the driving force of my life and ministry. You will be instruments of Christ, the eternal priest. You must live a holy life to be authentic instruments that do not obscure his presence or action. You must be him; his life must "come alive" in you.

Today, he configures you to Himself, the Good Shepherd. Day after day, you will need to configure yourselves to Him. You will not only proclaim his Word: you will be a living Word. You will not only absolve sins: you will reflect God's mercy and tenderness.

We heard these words from the Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." This newness

of life is primarily a gift of grace, demanding our daily response and adherence. You will not be able to accomplish this great task alone. The wisdom of the Fathers of the Church affirms: "No one can have God as Father unless he has the Church as Mother." We need the *humus* of ecclesial communion so that the seed of Christ's life can grow in us and bear fruit. We often have an excessively individualistic view of faith and the priestly ministry.

However, if we read the documents from the Second Vatican Council, we can see that they almost always speak of "presbyters" in plural: the "presbyterate." In fact, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Pastores dabo Vobis" affirms that "the ordained ministry has a radical 'communitarian form' and can only be carried out as 'a collective work'" (no. 17). According to the Council's vision, the priest is one

with other priests, the bishop, and the whole people of God. I will always be grateful to a priest who oversaw much of my formation for ministry. He always told us: "Every priest needs a home." By his life and his example, he taught me to be as I am, not to reduce priestly fraternity to a purely sacramental fact, but to live it. Concretely, he taught me to share joys and sorrows with my brothers, to share my experience and my goods, to know how to make a home and a family, to be close to everyone, and to learn from everyone. I thank God for reminding me of these words frequently, from my time as a seminarian to my ordination as a parish priest and my work as a professor, rector of the seminary, bishop, and now guiding the Dicastery for the Clergy. It is good to live like this and to build simple fraternal relationships. "I am the good shepherd," we read in the Gospel. "I know my sheep and my

sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." With these words, Jesus expresses a very familiar relationship between us and himself and the Father. We are called to bring this familiarity everywhere the Lord sends us in order to build the family of the Church, the family of the priesthood, and the family of the parish. Thus humanity will really become the family of God. And the Gospel reminds us to look beyond the flock in the enclosure: "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

"Sheep that are not of this fold..." I think, not without emotion, of Cardinal Van Thuan of Vietnam. After his arrest in Saigon, he was transported to the north of the country in a ship's hold. There he found himself chained together with

a fundamentalist Buddhist and fellow prisoners of different confessions. At that moment, he understood that the prison on that ship was his cathedral and the prisoners beside him were the people of God who had been entrusted to his pastoral care.

Dear ordinands, I want you to be priests like that, totally dedicated to Jesus, offering yourselves with him for the salvation of the world, brothers of all. Let us, therefore, entrust ourselves to Mary so that she may sing with us, "The Almighty has done great things in me; holy is his name."

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