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Homily at the Ordination of Deacons

Here is the homily given by Bishop Javier Echevarría when ordaining 31 faithful of Opus Dei to the diaconate on 3 November 2012, in the basilica of St. Eugene in Rome.

11/06/2012

Dear brothers and sisters,

Dear sons about to be ordained
deacons,

1. We have gathered together in this basilica to take part in the diaconal ordination of some faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Thanks be to God, this occasion is repeated every year, but we cannot grow used to the manifestations of Christ's goodness, who constantly assists the Church as he promised, granting vocations to the priesthood. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to increase throughout the world the number of sacred ministers who are well prepared and enthusiastic, in love with our Lord and dedicated entirely to the service of souls. In a word, may he grant us an abundance of holy priests, truly committed to the ministry entrusted to them.

Some words written by St Josemaría on a similar occasion continue to have great relevance today. "Since 1944 small groups of members of the Work have been ordained, each ordination giving witness to the

working of God's grace and to service to the Church. And yet," he continues, "each year some people are surprised. How is it, they ask, that thirty, forty or fifty men, whose lives are so rich in achievement and so full of promise, are ready to become priests?"[1]

The answer to this question can only be found *in the faith and from the faith*. In fact, it is a great manifestation of faith that men from many different countries, well prepared for the exercise of their profession, renounce advancement in civil life and joyfully take up the divine call to become sacred ministers.

2. Today's ordination takes place just a few weeks after the beginning of the Year of Faith, proclaimed by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in the Apostolic Letter which begins with these words: "The 'door of

faith' (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the Word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace.”[2]

These are words addressed to each one of us. Faith in God and in Jesus Christ is the foundation of all Christian life; it is what distinguishes Christ's disciples from others. Before responding to a request for a miracle, our Lord would wait for his listeners to give “proof” of this virtue. On a certain occasion, to those who asked him: *What can we do to accomplish the works of God?* (Jn 6:28), he responded: *This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent* (Jn 6:29). On other occasions, the Gospel clearly states that sometimes Jesus did not work

miracles because of his interlocutors' lack of faith (cf. *Mt* 13:58).

Faith is a gift which God bestows gratuitously on those who desire to believe and are disposed to welcome grace in their hearts and souls. This virtue requires, in first place, an adequate knowledge of the objective contents of revealed doctrine, in accord with each one's capacity; this is the purpose of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or of its *Compendium*. May we too try to read or re-read them during this year, in order to know better the doctrine of the faith and thus be able to transmit it to others.

Nevertheless, to have what we might call a "theoretical" knowledge of the Church's doctrine is not enough. "Having faith in the Lord," Benedict XVI explains, "is not something that solely involves our intelligence, the area of intellectual knowledge;

rather, it is a change that involves our life, our whole self: feelings, heart, intelligence, will, body, emotions and human relationships.”[3] And he poses a challenging question: “However, let us ask ourselves, is faith truly the transforming force in our life, in my life; or is it merely one of the elements that are part of existence, without being the crucial one that involves it totally?”[4] It is a question that entails a deep examination of conscience, to which each of us has to respond sincerely. Then we will discover that we can and ought to imbue our ordinary life with more faith, seriously seeking to discover God who awaits us in the events of each day.

St. Augustine said that believers “grow stronger by believing.”[5] And St Josemaría added: “To live the faith is also to transmit it to others.” We need to walk alongside our friends

and colleagues at work, to know how to listen to the difficulties which the Christian message might raise for them, to understand these friends and to show that we understand them, and, at the same time, to pray intensely for them. Only in this way will they feel understood and enlightened by our conversation, and we will be able to transmit with affection and kindness the Gospel, the living word of God: opening to them the marvels of the Christian spirit, which harmonises reason and faith, which answers all the questions and calms all the anxieties of the human heart. Thus we will help them to desire the sacraments (Confession and the Eucharist) and to prepare themselves adequately to receive them.

3. The ordination to the diaconate, and subsequently to the presbyterate, adds to the common mission of Christians some specific

features, in which the faith of those who are to be ordained ought to be shown. We will consider them briefly following the order of the questions which I will address in the name of the Church to those who are to be ordained, before conferring the sacrament.

In the first place, I will ask them if they are ready to exercise the diaconate with charity and humility, as collaborators of the bishop and priests, in the service of the Christian people. By their acceptance, the new deacons manifest their desire to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, who willed to make himself the servant of all. May you always fix your gaze upon him, my sons, as the supreme model of availability in your ministry.

Following this, they will express their readiness to guard with a pure conscience the mystery of the faith,

proclaiming it by word and deed, according to the Gospel, in complete fidelity to the magisterium of the Church. You have prepared yourselves during a number of years by means of a profound study of Catholic doctrine. Following the example of St. Josemaría, I urge you to dedicate some time each day to reflecting more deeply on the questions regarding faith and morals. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will be very useful to you, as the Holy Father has recommended to us. It is a source that will enrich both your homilies and your preaching.

You will also be entrusted with the task of praying daily the Liturgy of the Hours, giving voice to the prayer the Church raises to heaven in the name of all mankind, and of distributing Communion to the faithful. This closeness to Jesus, really present in the Most Holy Sacrament, has to make of you truly

Eucharistic men. Ask our Father to obtain for you the grace to always deal lovingly and reverently with holy things, even the more material ones, such as chalices, ciboria, etc., because of their connection with the Body and Blood of our Lord.

I offer my congratulations to the relatives and friends of those being ordained. And, in conclusion, I make my own the words with which St. Josemaría ended a homily in the Year of Faith that Paul IV proclaimed in 1967. He exhorted those present to employ the weapon of faith to conquer in the battles of Christian life. “For without faith, we lack the very foundation for the sanctification of everyday life.” And he continued: “A living faith in these moments, because we are drawing near to the *mysterium fidei* (1 Tim 3:9), to the Holy Eucharist; because we are about to participate in our Lord's Pasch,

which sums up and brings about the mercies of God among men.

“Faith, my sons, in order to acknowledge that within a few moments upon this altar ‘the Work of our Redemption’ is going to be renewed. Faith, so as to savour the Creed and to experience, upon this altar and in this Assembly, the presence of Christ, who makes us *cor unum et anima una* (Acts 4:32), one heart and one soul, a family, a Church which is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, which for us means the same as universal.

“Faith, finally, my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and of holy Mary.”[6]

May Jesus Christ be praised!

[1] St. Josemaría, Homily *A Priest Forever*, 13 April 1973.

[2] Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta fidei*, 11 October 2011, no. 1.

[3] Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, 17 October 2012.

[4] Ibid.

[5] St. Augustine, *On the Usefulness of Believing* 1, 2.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 123.