



# **HOMILY OF PRIESTLY ORDINATION**

Conferred by His Eminence

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If for every bishop priestly ordination is always a joy and an occasion to thank the Lord for the gift of a vocation that reaches the goal of the priesthood, it is even more so for me, because of the fraternal friendship that has bound me to your Congregation for so many years. Thank you, dear Father John, for this great gift.

Our joy, above all, is the expression of the joy and gratitude of the Church to the Lord for having called these young men to consecrate their lives to Him and that today He counts among His ministers. It is the joy of all Legionaries, of the communities where they have lived, of the superiors and formators who have accompanied them during the long and demanding journey of their spiritual and intellectual preparation. In these moments, our thoughts also go out to their families, especially those who could not be present but are close to us in affection and prayer.

The pages of Scripture that have been proposed for our meditation help us to prepare for the solemnity of the rite of Ordination, which with its gestures and words is already a homily. I would like to dwell on the passage from John's Gospel, which takes us back to the Last Supper, to Jesus praying for the Apostles. They now belong to God, who has called them through Him and they have become his. Now, as he is about to take the path of Calvary and will no longer be among them, he turns to the Father because they will remain at the mercy of the world and will be deprived of his visible presence and protection.

What does Jesus ask for them and for those who will take their place in the centuries to come? Therefore, for us as well? There are two themes overall. *I do not pray that you remove them from the world, but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are not of the world as I am not of the world.* Until then, Jesus had been the meeting point of their small community, he had been its center, so much so that they had left everything behind, family and work, and had become one with Him.

However, when He will no longer be in their midst, they should not lose confidence and joy because He lives with the Father and they will receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus does not ask that his disciples live in an idyllic world, where everything is easy, but that their faith be safeguarded and preserved in the midst of difficulties, misunderstandings, temptations, not trusting in their own strength. During the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, the Pope reminded us that we must not allow ourselves to be maligned by the temptation of triumphalism, of success, nor caged in the mentality of a simple official who, instead of keeping his gaze fixed on the Cross of Jesus, takes pleasure in his own abilities.

Dear *Ordinandi*, in a few moments, I will impose my hands on your heads and, with me, so will all the priests present. There are no words because the gesture speaks for itself and, as you know, it indicates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which in biblical tradition is the sign of God's blessing and the conferring of a singular mission.

With the very ancient gesture of the laying on of hands, Pope Benedict said in one of his homilies, "the Lord takes possession of me, saying to me. "You belong to me." However, in saying this he also said: "You are under the protection of my hands. You are under the protection of my heart. You are kept safely in the palm of my hands, and this is precisely how you find yourself in the immensity of my love." (13.4.2006). When you find yourself in difficult moments of your priestly life, think of this presence, this protection of the good God. He always keeps His hand over you, He wants to accompany you and protect you at all times.

In his prayer to the Father, Jesus asks again: *Consecrate them in truth. Your Word is truth...for them I consecrate myself, that they too may be consecrated in truth.* To sanctify means to remove all that is profane and to dedicate oneself to God. In every offering the gift must be accompanied by a disposition of sacrifice and Jesus, with these words, consecrates himself and all things to the Father. Jesus' consecration is above all a separation from the world, making it the exclusive property of the Father, and a sacrifice because he gives himself to the Father by offering himself as a victim on the Cross. Consequently, we too, like the apostles, are priests and consecrated because we are united to Jesus, the one and only eternal priest. Let us let him enter our hearts. Let us empty ourselves of all that impedes our encounter with him. Let us throw ourselves into his arms, let us trust him totally. Let us let ourselves be carried where he wants us to go.

When I anoint your hands with Sacred Chrism, I will say: *May the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father has anointed in the Holy Spirit and in power, keep you for the sanctification of his people and for the offering of the sacrifice.* Already in the Old Testament the anointing is a symbol of holiness and with the anointing, once again, the Lord takes possession of you and entrusts you with a special mission. I return to Pope Benedict's homily: The human hand is the instrument of human action, it is the symbol of the human capacity to face the world. The Lord now wants our hands so that they may become his own in the world. He no longer wants them to be instruments for taking things, but instead, by putting ourselves at the service of his love, they can pass on his divine touch.

Jesus continues in his prayer: *As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.* The Church's inherent vocation, her deepest identity, her service to mankind is to

preach the Gospel of Jesus, to perpetuate his sacrifice in the Mass, the memorial of his death and resurrection, to be the channel of his grace. Our consecration is not for us, but for those to whom we are sent, to transmit and communicate to them what we have received so that, following in his footsteps, with his same love and obedience, his Word may bear much fruit and with the grace of the Holy Spirit reach the ends of the earth through our preaching and the witness of our lives.

Mother Teresa wrote to a priest, "*Let us grow more and more in Christ-likeness so that all those we meet, when they look at us, see only Jesus in us and through us.*" (*Mother Teresa, Be my light*, p. 299) because the apostle draws others first of all with his testimony of life and example.

The good Father Alvaro, of blessed memory, in the letter he sent to the Congregation for the Year for Priests, described the figure of the Legionary as a man of God who brings Christ to souls and offers them what he himself has contemplated; as a humble servant of all with the same spirit of service as Jesus, who humbled himself by becoming obedient even unto death; as a tireless savior of souls, and he added: The priest must always be an open door to everyone, he must know how to listen, treat each person with all his heart, dedicating to each one the time necessary, loving and welcoming everyone like Jesus Christ himself. He does not give only his time, but his very life without limits. It can be said that his vocation is to be a martyr in the service of his neighbor. A single soul is worth all the efforts of a priest. (*El amor es más fuerte*, pg.270).

Before the Prayer of Ordination, you will perform a gesture that is rich in meaning, one that always leaves a lasting impression: that of prostrating yourselves on the ground, like Moses and like the Visionary of the Apocalypse, who prostrates himself at the feet of the Son of Man. With you, we will invoke the intercession of all the Saints so that they may join our prayer in asking the Lord for His help for your ministry, strengthen you with the gifts of His grace and give you the certainty that He will always be with you. Today, you begin a journey that you do not know where it will lead you, but be certain that, wherever you are, the Spirit of the Lord will be your strength and your light.

We entrust you to the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles. Put your hand in hers and ask her to take care of you, to protect and preserve you, as she did Jesus.