

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS
LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST
16 December 2017

I would like to start by thanking Father Eduardo for inviting me to preside over the rite of Ordinations of these brothers. I met your congregation many years ago, when I arrived as Papal Nuncio to Mexico and received many examples from your apostolic zeal, depth of your spiritual life, and your love for the Church. These moments make me feel even closer to you and urge me to take you in my prayers.

Before we begin the rite of Ordinations, which is eloquent in itself, the Church invites us to ponder for a moment on the Word of God we have just heard, and to recollect ourselves in reflection to be able to live these moments of joy and gratitude that the Lord grants all of us today. The brothers, who today receive the sacrament of Holy Orders have already consecrated themselves to the Lord with the Perpetual Profession of vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Today, after a long and proven preparation, the Church calls them to be Her ministers in the priesthood.

This Sunday, in the liturgy called the ‘Gaudete’, marks the halfway point through our preparation for Christmas. It is the Sunday of joy, because the Lord is coming to save us. *“Rejoice in the Lord always: I say, rejoice, the Lord is at hand”*, says the entrance antiphon, taken from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians. Well suited is this antiphon for today’s festive atmosphere, in which the Mother Church rejoices with the enriching of the number of Her ministers, who, coming from many countries, make us feel in communion with the Universal Church and, dare I say, serve as evidence of the fruitfulness of your congregation’s charism. A few days ago, His Holiness, Pope Francis, reminded the priests Bangladesh that without joy, you cannot serve the Lord!

Our joy, then, is one of gratitude to the Lord, who is the protagonist of all good. From him flows the vocation and the grace to persevere in it. Our thoughts go out in special way to all those who have seen the birth, and have supported the response of the ordinands to the Lord’s call: their families, superiors, and their formators.

The liturgy of the Word presents us with some figures who, although very different from each other, find themselves as proclaimers of the Kingdom of God. The first figure is that of the Prophet Isaiah, who appeals to the people of Israel exiled in Babylon, with the message of hope, liberation, consolation to the sick, the enslaved, and the imprisoned. Centuries later, in a remote village of Nazareth, Jesus repeats the same words at the beginning of his public life: *“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled that you have heard.”* Jesus said that the Kingdom of God has now entered into history of humanity, and all those who are of poor and contrite heart will be allowed in it. His Holiness, Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii*

Gaudium, that the Church will be the place of mercy, where everyone can feel welcome, loved, forgiven, and encouraged to live the life of the Gospel (#114)

Dear ordinands, the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, to consecrate you with the anointing, and to make you partakers in the Priesthood of Christ in a singular and unique way. With your ministry, you will act in His name. You are called to proclaim to everyone that God has not abandoned man, to bring a message of confidence and brotherhood to all those who face many evils afflicted on society, to be the words of consolation to all those who suffer injustice and grief. You are called to defend them in their rights, and to provide for them through the many works that the Congregation has developed over many years, which are already a fulfillment of the biblical passage we have heard today.

The Gospel presents us with John the Baptist, who calls himself “*a voice crying out in the wilderness*”, and has assumed the duty of announcing to humanity Christ and His Kingdom. As St. John the Evangelist says, “he is the witness came to bear witness to the light”, who is Jesus. As priests, it is your special duty, as the Church teaches in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, to proclaim the Gospel of God to all men, who have the right to seek the word of God from the lips of the priests. Therefore, dear ordinands, let your whole ministry be dedicated to the service of the word of God, who is no other than Jesus Christ and his Gospel. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Hebrews, gives us the identity card of the Apostles of Jesus, chosen and called among men, and made into persons pertaining to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Dear ordinands, having invoked the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the Saints, by the laying on of hands, and the ordination prayer you will receive the dignity of the priesthood to celebrate the mysteries of Christ, according to the tradition of the Church, especially in the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrament of reconciliation, to the praise of God and the sanctification of the Christian people. You will then be transformed in him and your identification with Christ will reach such a depth that you will become a living tool of his work. Each ministry will be entrusted to you, you must always be a minister of Christ Jesus, as if your person disappears in front of his because he will work in you and through you. Don't say, maybe the priest is an *alter Christus* and acts *in persona Christi*. This is the path to holiness which you must resume daily with humility, obedience and charity in order to make this your ministry, your work corresponds to your being. Brothers and sisters, those whom you will encounter, expect from you this testimony of life. Do not ever let your failings and the challenges of ministry discourage you. If you remain solicitous to the Lord in prayer and persevere in offering the compassion of Christ to your brothers and sisters, then the Lord will certainly fill your hearts with the comforting joy of his Holy Spirit (see Pope Francis, *To the Priests and Religious of Bangladesh*, O.R.3.12.17).

At the end of the ordination rite, I will give you the paten and the cup and I will tell you: Realize what you do, imitate what you celebrate, conform your life to the mystery of the Cross of Christ. This is the wish, which is transformed into prayer, which I formulate from the heart, in the name of everyone, to each one of you. May the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, take you by the hand and accompany you in every moment of your life, in your service to Jesus and to his Church.