



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Good Shepherd Sunday

Sunday, 3 May 1998

1. The Good Shepherd! This biblical figure is drawn from observation and experience. For a long time Israel was a people of shepherds, and the tradition from the time of the patriarchs and subsequent generations is reflected in the texts of the Old Testament. The shepherd, the one who watches over his flock and leads it to fertile pastures, became the image of the man who guides and heads a nation, ever mindful of its concerns. This is how the shepherd of Israel is depicted in the Old Testament.

In his preaching, Jesus refers to this image but introduces a completely new element: *the shepherd is the one who lays down his life for his sheep* (cf. *Jn* 10:11-18). He attributes this trait to the good shepherd, distinguishing him from the hireling, who therefore cares nothing for his flock. Indeed, he presents himself as the prototype of the good shepherd who is able to give his life for his flock. The Father has sent him into the world so that he will not be the shepherd of Israel alone but of all humanity.

It is especially in the Eucharist that the *work of the Good Shepherd* becomes sacramentally present; after preaching the “Good News” of the kingdom, he offered his own life in sacrifice for his sheep. Indeed, the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Lord’s Death and Resurrection, of his supreme act of Redemption. It is the sacrament in which the Good Shepherd makes his sacrificial love for all constantly present.

2. Dear deacons of the Diocese of Rome, on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, usually called “Good Shepherd Sunday”, when the World Day of Prayer for Vocations is celebrated, you are about to receive the sacrament of the priesthood, which will conform you to Christ the Good Shepherd. You will become ministers “who through his Spirit continually exercises his priestly function for our benefit in the liturgy” (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 5).

With the sacrament of Baptism, you will bring individuals into the People of God; with that of Penance, you will reconcile sinners with God and with the Church; and with the Anointing of the Sick, you will alleviate the sufferings of the infirm. Above all, you will be ministers of the Eucharist: you will receive this sacrament as a priceless inheritance in which the mystery of Christ's sacrifice is renewed daily and the decisive event of his Death and Resurrection for the world's salvation continues. You will celebrate the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, as he himself offered it for the first time in the Upper Room, on the eve of his Passion. You will thus be personally associated with the mystery of the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep.

Be conscious of the sublime mission which is entrusted to you today! It consists of sharing in Christ's own mission. You will be his priests for ever: *"Tu es sacerdos in aeternum"*.

And every day, dear friends, as you devoutly approach the altar, renew your generous "here I am" to the Lord, so that your life, in the image of the Good Shepherd's, may be totally dedicated to the good of souls.

3. Dear deacons, the Church in Rome rejoices at your ordination. I am the first to rejoice, because as your Bishop I can lay my hands upon you, invoking on you the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops and the diocesan priests, whose presbyterate you are about to enter as promising younger brothers, rejoice with me. Your parents, your relatives and friends and all who have guided you in your formation and share your joy today are happy as well. The whole diocesan community, gathered here in spirit, gives thanks to the Holy Spirit for the gift of this spiritual fruitfulness.

With deep gratitude it sings the hymn *Veni Creator*, imploring an abundance of the seven gifts for you:

*"Accende lumen sensibus, infunde amorem cordibus
Infirma nostri corporis, virtute firmans perpeti"*.

Mindful of the example of the Good Shepherd, who by the sacrifice of his own life protected the flock from the enemy, the Church of Rome also prays:

*"Hostem repellas longius, pacemque dones protinus
Ductore sic te praeviso vitemus omne noxium"*.

She calls upon the Spirit of truth to lead you to full knowledge of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

*“Per te sciamus da Patrem, noscamus atque Filium,
Te utriusque Spiritum credamus omni tempore”.*

And with hearts overflowing with gratitude for the ineffable mystery which is accomplished in you today, we proclaim together the glory of the triune God:

*“Deo Patri sit gloria, et Filio, qui a mortuis
Surrexit, ac Paraclito, in saeculorum saecula”.*

Amen!

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