



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 1 April 1999

1. *"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever"* (Rv 1:5-6).

Christ, the Priest of the new and eternal Covenant, through his blood has entered into the heavenly sanctuary, having obtained the forgiveness of the sins of all humanity, once and for all.

On the threshold of the *Triduum sacrum*, the priests of the world's particular Churches gather with their Ordinaries for the solemn Chrism Mass, during which they renew their priestly promises. The *presbyterium* of the Church in Rome also gathers around its Bishop before the great day on which the liturgy recalls how Christ, through his blood, became the one and eternal priest.

I cordially greet each of you, dear brothers in the priesthood, with a special thought for the Cardinal Vicar and the Cardinals concelebrating, the Auxiliary Bishops and the other prelates present. It gives me great joy to be with you again on this day, which for us ordained ministers is redolent of the sacred anointing with which we were consecrated in the image of him who is the Consecrated One of the Father.

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him" (Rv 1:7). Tomorrow, the Good Friday liturgy will make present for us what the author of the Book of Revelation describes with the words proclaimed just now. On this most holy day of the Passion and Death of Christ, all the altars will be stripped and enveloped in deep silence: no Mass will be celebrated at the moment in which we make our annual commemoration of the one sacrifice, offered in a bloody manner by Christ the priest on the altar of the Cross.

2. *"[He] made us a kingdom [of] priests"* (Rv 1:6). Christ not only personally accomplished the redemptive sacrifice which takes away the sins of the world and gives perfect praise to the glory of

the Father. He also instituted the priesthood as a sacrament of the New Covenant, so that the one sacrifice he offered to the Father in a bloody manner might be continually renewed in the Church in an unbloody manner, under the appearances of bread and wine. Holy Thursday is precisely the day we recall, in a special way, the priesthood Christ instituted at the Last Supper, binding it indissolubly to the Eucharistic sacrifice.

"[He] made us ... priests". He has made us sharers in his one priesthood so that on all the altars of the world down through the ages of history, the bloody and unrepeatable sacrifice of Calvary can be re-presented. Holy Thursday is the great feast-day of priests. This evening we will renew the memorial of the institution of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, according to the rhythm of the paschal events, just as the Gospels hand it down to us. Instead, this morning's solemn liturgy is a special thanksgiving to God for a gift which is a mystery, by all of us who intimately share in Christ's priesthood. Each of us makes the psalm's words his own: "*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*". "For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord" (Ps 88:2).

3. Let us renew in ourselves the awareness of this gift. In a certain sense, we would like to receive it again, to direct it towards further service. Our sacramental priesthood is, in fact, a ministry, a unique and specific service. We serve Christ, so that his one and unrepeatable priesthood may always be living and active in the Church for the good of the faithful. We serve the Christian people, our brothers and sisters who, through our sacramental ministry, come to share ever more deeply in Christ's Redemption.

Today, with special intensity, each of us can repeat with Christ the words of the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed in the Gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners. To announce a year of favour from the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19).

4. "A year of favour from the Lord"! Dear friends, we now find ourselves on the threshold of an extraordinary year of grace, that of the Great Jubilee in which we will celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the Incarnation. Today is the last Holy Thursday before the Year 2000.

Today I am pleased to offer in spirit to the priests of the entire world the Letter I addressed to them for this occasion. In the year dedicated to the Father, the fatherhood of each priest, a reflection of that of the heavenly Father, must be made more conspicuous so that the Christian people and all people of every race and culture experience God's love for them and faithfully follow him. May the forthcoming Jubilee be a favourable occasion for everyone to experience God's merciful love, a powerful spiritual energy which renews the human heart.

During this solemn Eucharistic celebration, let us ask the Lord to develop the grace of the Great Jubilee to the full in all the members of Christ's Body, which is the Church, and particularly in priests.

The Holy Year, now at hand, calls all of us, ordained ministers, to make ourselves totally available to the gift of mercy which God the Father wants to lavish on every human being. The Father seeks such priests (cf. Jn 4:23)! May he find them imbued with his holy anointing, to spread the joyous message of salvation among the poor.

Amen!

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