



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE SEMINARIANS OF THE ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY

Saturday, 23 February 1979

1. Let us direct our attention today to the thought of St Paul, which the sacred liturgy proposes to us. The second reading of the Mass, taken from the letter to the Romans, seems "written" for those who must meditate on the problem of their vocation in a special, profound way and must also responsibly take decisions about it.

The passage of St Paul's letter speaks in the first place of our eternal vocation: "For those whom he (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). Certainly more than once we have reflected on this penetrating mystery. Our vocation has its source only in God, who knows each of us in the Word, his Son, and knowing "predestines", so that we too may become his sons. In this way, the eternal and only-begotten Son, generated, not created, of the same substance as the Father", has his brothers on earth, and he is "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29).

To think of one's vocation means being familiar with the eternal mystery which is the mystery of charity, the mystery of grace. This is precisely the fundamental and full dimension of our preparation for the priesthood. Grace constitutes, at the same time, the essential foundation of vocation in each of us. I hope that you will deepen your priestly vocation in the seminary, beginning from this mystery of grace. A vocation is a grace and a gift of God in Jesus Christ. By means of the priesthood, we become particularly like Jesus, "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). This awareness of the divine gift gives our vocation its deep meaning, in the perspective of our whole life. Human life, then, has its full value when it constitutes the reflection and the fulfilment of Eternal Truth and of unique Love.

2. Continuing to follow St Paul's thought, we become aware that a vocation is a task, as well as a gift. Moreover, its consolidation and deepening throughout the course of human life cannot take place without an effort and without spiritual struggle. Otherwise how can we understand and

explain these words: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31), These words have their real meaning, their first value, only on the lips of one who not only seeks, but also fights. What does he fight for? To what does the struggle lead? He fights precisely for the victory which consists in the realization of God's eternal thought in himself, in his soul, for the truth of his vocation, for its deepest meaning. In this search, in this interior struggle he must take up a position, in a certain sense, face to face with the full reality of love, which God revealed to man in Christ: "He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32).

The result of this comparison with the revealed reality of God's love, and in particular with that of our eternal vocation, is this question of St Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:35).

Just so. At the centre of reflection on our priestly vocation there is this love: "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2: 20); "looking upon me, he loved me" (cf. Mk 10:21). If there had not been this look, if there had not been this love, I should not be here. I should not be on this way. This way must be my vocation until the end of my life... Do I know what it consists of? Do I persevere in it? St Paul's answer is: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8:37). This is an incredibly important task. This is the key principle of the whole formation to the priesthood and to priestly life, of priestly asceticism and of the priestly ministry:

"I am sure"

—the Apostle continues—"that neither death nor life...nor things present nor things to come... nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

What can "height" mean? What can "anything else in all creation" mean? What can "depth" mean, in the perspective of our vocation? It is necessary to look at all that with a full sense of concreteness, considering adequately the reality which "I myself" constitute. And it is necessary to look at all that in the spirit of faith; in the spirit of hope and trust.

3. This last word directs us to Mary, "Mother of trust". Today's festivity is particularly dear to you all, because the Roman Seminary is dedicated precisely to our Lady of Trust.

Before the devotional image of the Mother of Trust, so venerated and treasured so lovingly in this Seminary, numberless ranks of seminarians have knelt for over a century and a half and, in Mary's motherly aid, they found the strength to overcome moments of difficulty and the generosity of commitment required by a faithful response to vocation.

"Mater mea, fiducia mea", is the familiar prayer within these walls. Mary is an inexhaustible source of trust because she is our Mother. Each of us can say: Jesus "looking upon me, loved me" (cf. Mk 10:21). He turned his special look upon me and loved me particularly when, from the cross, he

said to his disciple, indicating his Mother: "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:27).

If, therefore, to accept one's vocation, to choose the priesthood, to persevere in the priesthood, means "to believe in love" (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), then, in the whole of your life (first as a seminarian, then as a priest), it is necessary to insert deeply also this look from the cross and our Master's last words: "Behold, your mother". With the help of such faith and such trust, our priesthood is constructed. It assumes a special resemblance to him who, precisely as Mary's Son, became "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). Then the priest absorbs, somehow, a particular and personal ray of this hope and this trust, which is so necessary, for the man who has been called, in travelling along the sometimes difficult paths of life, on which he must respond to eternal Love.

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