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139/2012

**HOMILY BY ARCHBISHOP PAUL CREMONA O.P.
DURING THE EPISCOPAL ORDINATION OF MONSIGNOR CHARLES J. SCICLUNA**

Your Excellency, President of Malta, Eminencies, Excellencies, brothers and sisters.

We are gathered here today for the Episcopal Ordination of Monsignor Charles Scicluna in celebrating his election as Auxiliary Bishop of the Church in Malta. We start by thanking God for choosing people to be so close to his salvific will for men. I, personally and in the name of the Church in Malta, would like to show my gratitude to His Holiness Pope Benedict for sending us Monsignor Scicluna - with his talents and experience - to help me and the Church in Malta on its way towards holiness.

The Order of Bishop is part of the sacrament of Holy Orders. It is the third Order in Ordination after the Presbyterate and the Diaconate. In it is the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Its fulfilment, like that of any other Christian vocation, should be in accordance with God's will as revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

Unlike in other religions, our God, as revealed to us by Jesus Christ, is a God who has man as his centre of interest. While in other religions, God remains aloof and expects man to approach him, in Christianity, it is God, in the person of Jesus Christ, who comes to us to draw us to him. This already gives us an idea of what the Church is and of what the Bishop, who represents Christ, should be.

This is shown very clearly in today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah and in the Gospel.

The choice of the text from Isaiah stems from the fact that it is the same text chosen by Our Lord Jesus Christ to present his mission in the Synagogue in Nazareth. Our Lord Jesus Christ started by quoting from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me..." From then on, the human being, especially in suffering, is the centre of Isaiah's speech. No priest can substitute this declaration made by Christ with other strategies or values.

In the Gospel chosen for this occasion, Our Lord Jesus Christ presents himself to us as a shepherd. But while he praises the Shepherd, it seems that what is more precious to him are the sheep for which he gives his life. The value of the sheep is at the centre of this parable.

Dear Monsignor Scicluna, our dignity as Bishops derives from the fact that we are at the service of the dignity of the people entrusted to our care. Today, our Lord is entrusting you with what is most precious to him, that is, the human being. Our dignity stems from this. It is a great honour and a sign of God's great trust that God first chooses the Church and then some of its members and entrusts them with the care of human persons. This is what he is entrusting you with today.

This gives us a clear understanding of the consecration which Isaiah speaks about. Because now, the Holy Spirit will descend upon you and consecrate you, so that, in a specified time and place, you may accomplish that which Isaiah says and which our Lord Jesus Christ took upon him as his mission: that in the name of God you may be "the one who 'announces a year of grace of the Lord'" to all human beings, but especially to the poor and to those who are suffering. This brings out the meaning of the words of Isaiah to which Christ referred in Nazareth: "because the Lord has anointed me". Your consecration in your Priestly Ordination, by which you emptied yourself through the commitment of celibacy, will now be brought to its fullness with your Episcopal Ordination.

Our dignity as bishops does not only come from our ministry to human beings. It ultimately comes from God who has entrusted the Church with the necessary means and graces to lead humanity to himself. This is the mission of the Church, because the Church is the go-between between God and all men. It is the continuation of the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place and throughout time. The fullness of the ministerial priesthood which you will be receiving in your Episcopal Ordination is the mission through which the Bishop helps the faithful to live their calling as Christians. This means that the Bishop's is not a personal dignity: it is given to him for others. It is a great dignity and a great responsibility which the Church entrusts primarily to Bishops in a specific place and entrusts them mainly with all the means it has available for the sanctification of Christians: namely the sacraments and the Word of God.

Saint Paul's words to Timothy are very clear: "Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us". Today, in your Consecration, the Holy Spirit will start dwelling in you with special gifts to help you carry out your mission. This 'precious gift' which has been entrusted to you is this spiritual strength by which the Bishop is able to lead many to perfection.

Saint Paul also says that the Bishop has to live the calling he has received, with a deep sense of humility and mystery. Saint Paul writes: "that (the Lord) has saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus." The Lord does not choose us because he finds us worthy; if he did, he would not have chosen fishermen and publicans as his apostles. He chooses us so that the Spirit may form us to serve his people.

The Episcopate is not a point of arrival but a way of perfection for those chosen. The words which should inspire us are those same words which our Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter: “Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21,15 ff)

In reply to Peter’s positive answer, Jesus says that this love should translate itself into the care of his lambs and his sheep. Peter’s ministry, and therefore that of the Bishop, should be based on the loving relationship with Jesus; a love which then is to be dispersed on those entrusted to his care.

We can refer again to Saint Paul’s advice to Timothy in the passage which we read today: “and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, for which I was appointed preacher, apostle and teacher”. Saint Paul urges Timothy, and through him all Bishops, to cooperate with the Spirit in their Episcopal mission: “My dear child, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands: for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power, love and self-control.”

May we treasure in our hearts the words which Saint Paul addressed to the Philippians in the beginning of his letter: “I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” (Ph 1, 3.8)

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