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THE ARCHBISHOP'S HOMILY DURING THE MASS OF ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD OF FOUR NEW PRIESTS

“This is the day the Lord has made: let us be glad and rejoice in it. Hallelujah” (Ps 118:24).

These last days, which in the Liturgy of the Church count as one day, we have been repeating the words of Psalm 118, verse 24. The reference to all that the Lord God did in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is obvious, actual and fitting. Today, while we are preparing for the Priestly Ordination of these our brothers, Peter, Jean, Aayrton and Matthew, we repeat the words of the Psalm with gratitude and hope.

This day of your ordination has God as its author, it is a work of His mercy. Rightly we say “the right hand of the Lord has struck with power” (Ps 118:16). You who know your sins and your weaknesses, today proclaim with the words of the same Psalm 118: “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (vs. 17). You who are passing through the test of humiliation, suffering, discouragement, today proclaim with the words of the same Psalm: “Though the Lord has indeed chastised me, yet he has not delivered me to death” (vs. 18). May the Lord be your strength, your treasure and your salvation. Every day of your life as priests, turn to God the Father as His sons and tell him humbly: “I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my saviour” (vs. 21).

These are the same words that the early Church understood to be Jesus’ expression of gratitude to the Father when He experienced the resurrection. The Son in whom the Father was well pleased, who from the Cross uttered the agonised cry of abandonment: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46b), now shouts out His delight in victory full of gratitude: “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (Ps 118:17).

Today the Risen Jesus is giving you a very close share in His mission. He is sending you into the world: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). He is trusting you, in the same way He trusts us, although He knows very well that we, like the apostles, are vulnerable people; sometimes thrown into depression on a way which is full of tears, we are victims of many doubts and full of sadness. He knows all this and still He keeps on trusting us with the Good News.

He knows that sometimes our faith fails us and we are obstinate, but just the same He sends us out into the world as His witnesses. Our mandate from Him is one of service and not of power so that whoever sees us will know and understand well that, like Peter and John, we are “those close to Jesus.” He is trusting us with the power to heal in His name, in a special way in the administration of the Sacraments. He is giving us the “courage” to speak in His name and not in our own name.

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). This inner persuasion of the first apostles has been passed down to the shepherds of future generations, to us. Equally applicable to each and every one of us are the words of the Apostle St Paul, our Father in Faith: “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate” (1 Tim 4:14). Do not neglect your gift. Persevere in it. Above all “set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity” (1 Tim 4:12). St Paul insists with Timothy that he should be faithful to the true teaching. “Attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). This faithfulness goes together with the way the disciple should often examine himself: “Attend to yourself and to your teaching” (1 Tim 4:16a). The prayer of the priest should be that he must achieve glory together with his flock: “Persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you” (1 Tim 4:16b).

Be priests who are full of enthusiasm, holy, faithful, full of joy. Pray so that, following your example, the good Lord will call new vocations to the priesthood. Give up your lives so that your joy in the Lord will never be found wanting. Do not be afraid of hard work and insults. Let your gaze always rest on the Crucified and Victorious Lord whose wounds are doors and windows on the heart of God: a heart full of mercy and compassion, a heart that knows how to love and that has a pure thirst for the love of humanity. Never give up your own humble prayers. Seek out the fraternity of your brother priests and be spiritual fathers to the People of God who are rejoicing today with you, the new priests of the Lord. Make sure that your obedience is sincere, that your purity is humble, that your only treasure is the Lord. Seek the Lord in those who are poor and downtrodden; love Him in your neighbour; serve Him in your brothers; praise Him in His creation; give Him glory with your lives and your faithfulness.

“He who began this good work in you will bring it to completion” (Phil 1:6).

Amen.

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