



The Holy See

PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*41st World Day of Prayer for Vocations
Fourth Sunday of Easter, 2 May 2004*

1. *"The Good Shepherd is risen! He who laid down his life for his sheep... Alleluia"* (Communion Antiphon).

The liturgy today invites us to fix our gaze on Christ the Good Shepherd. *Agnus redemit oves*, the Easter Sequence sings. "The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb". The Only-Begotten Son of the Father, the Good Shepherd of humanity, *died on the Cross and, on the third day, rose from the dead*.

This is the Good News that the Apostles, clothed with power by the Holy Spirit, brought to all the peoples, starting with Jerusalem (cf. Lk 24: 47-49). This is the Good News that continues to ring out at the beginning of the third millennium. The compassionate gaze of Christ, the risen Good Shepherd, is the origin of the gift and mystery of the vocation to pastoral ministry in the Church.

2. Dear Deacons who will shortly be ordained priests, your call to the priesthood was born from this same loving gaze. I welcome you with affection and greet you, one by one. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Bishop Vicegerent, the Members of the Diocesan Bishops' Council. I greet the Rectors and Superiors of the Pontifical Roman Major Seminary, of the Diocesan Seminary *Redemptoris Mater*, of the Almo Collegio Capranica and of the Oblates Sons of Our Lady of Divine Love, who have supervised your formation. I greet Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur and the formation staff of the "Priestly Fraternity of the Sons of the Cross", and I greet and thank the Superior and formation staff of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to your families, to the priests who have supervised your

formation and the growth of your faith, and to all those who, together with your parish communities and the ecclesial situations to which you belong, have helped you to discover the "gift and mystery" of your vocation and to say "yes" to the Lord's call.

3. You are becoming priests at a time when even here in Rome strong cultural trends *seem to want to make people forget God*, especially young people and families. But *do not be afraid*: God will always be with you! With his help you will be able to find the paths that lead to the heart of every person, and proclaim to all that the Good Shepherd laid down his life for them and wants them to share in his mystery of love and salvation. However, to accomplish this very necessary task Jesus must always be *the centre of your life*, and you *must maintain deep union with him* through prayer, daily personal meditation, fidelity to the *Liturgy of the Hours* and, above all, the devout daily *celebration of the Eucharist*. If you are filled with God, you will be true apostles of the new evangelization, for no one can give what he does not have in his heart.

May Mary, the sweet Mother of the Good Shepherd for whom I invite you all to constantly foster deep filial devotion, accompany you and watch over you always.

Amen.

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