



JOHN PAUL II

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

Holy mass with priestly ordinations homily of JOHN PAUL II: Manchester, Monday, 31 May 1982

My brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

1. I greet you in the joy of the Holy Spirit! The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church is for every Christian a time of celebration and an opportunity for spiritual renewal. How pleased I am to be here in Manchester, to celebrate this great feast and to pray with you that the life-giving power of the Divine Paraclete will help the members of this Church to carry out their responsibilities as “a new creation.”

To be a new creation is the vocation of all the baptized. Saint Paul reminds us of this in the words of today’s second reading: “. . . for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here” (2 Cor. 5, 17). We must therefore give up the old order of the flesh, of sinfulness and living for ourselves. We must live “for him who died and was raised to life” for us (Ibid. 5, 15). Every believer is called to discipleship. By steadfastness in prayer by compassion for those in need, by concern for justice in human affairs, Christians exercise the priesthood of the faithful, a living fellowship in Christ offering praise and glory to God our Father.

2. But if we can apply the attributes of this new order of creation to the priesthood of the faithful, how much more compelling is their application to the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, which is directed towards the sanctification of God’s people.

3. My dear brothers, candidates for the priesthood: for you Christ today renews his prayer to the Father: “Consecrate them in truth, your word is truth” (Io. 17, 17). This consecration makes you even more a “new creation”. It sets you apart from the world, so that

you may be completely dedicated to God.

It gives you the mission to act as Christ’s ambassadors in reconciling the world to God. It was for this purpose that Jesus came from the Father and was born of the Virgin Mary. And it is this same mission which Christ entrusted to his disciples: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth” (Ibid. 17, 18). At this important moment of your lives I say to you young men: Realize how deeply Jesus desires you to be consecrated as he himself is consecrated. Realize how closely the bond of priesthood joins you to Christ. Be worthy of the privilege you are going to receive of bringing God’s gifts of love to his people and offering to God the people’s prayerful response.

4. You must be men of God, his close friends. You must develop daily patterns of prayer, and penance must be a regular part of your life. Prayer and penance will help you to appreciate more deeply that the strength of your ministry is found in the Lord and not in human resources.

England is fortunate to have a distinguished legacy of holy priests. Many of her sons left home and country in penal times to prepare for the priesthood. After ordination, they returned to England to face danger and often death for their faith. Manchester is rightly proud of its great martyr, Saint Ambrose Barlow, the Benedictine. Catholic Lancashire honours its other martyrs: Saint Edmund Arrowsmith and all those saints called “John”: John Almond, John Plessington, John Rigby, John Southworth. But in addition to your martyrs, rejoice in the memory of many holy priests from this region who lived each day the fullness of their vocation. Near here, in Sutton, St Helens, is the tomb of Blessed Dominic Barberi, the Passionist from Italy who received John Henry Newman into the

Church. He is but one example of the countless other priests who continue to serve as models of holiness for the clergy of today.

5. You must try to deepen every day your friendship with Christ. You must also learn to share the hopes and the joys, the sorrows and the frustrations of the people entrusted to your care. Bring to them Christ's saving message of reconciliation. Visit your parishioners in their homes. This has been a strength of the Church in England. It is a pastoral practice that should not be neglected. And do not forget all those with special needs, particularly those who are in prison, and their families. In the Gospel, Christ identifies himself with prisoners when He says: "I was in prison and you visited me." And remember, that He did not specify whether they were innocent or guilty. Because you represent Christ, no one can be excluded from your pastoral love. I ask you, together with your brother priests, to take my greetings to all the prisons of Britain. Especially to the large one in Manchester. Through you, Jesus Christ wants to offer peace of conscience and the forgiveness of all sins. Through you, Jesus Christ wants to enkindle hope anew in your hearts.

Through you, Jesus Christ wants to love those for whom he died. Teach all your people that you believe in that faithful love by the fidelity with which you live your own life. You must proclaim the Gospel with your life. When you celebrate the sacraments at the decisive moments of their lives, help them to trust in Christ's promised mercy and compassion. When you offer the redeeming Sacrifice of the Eucharist, help them to understand the need for transforming this great love into works of charity.

6. My brothers, be aware of the effect on others of the witness of lives. Your ordination is a source of consolation for those who have already given many years of priestly service, large numbers of whom are present today. The Lord is grateful for their labour and today he blesses them with the assurance that he will continue to provide for the future of the Church. May all these priests be renewed in the joyful enthusiasm of their early call, and may they continue to give generously of themselves in Christ's priestly work of reconciling the world to the Father.

I know of the many priests who could not be here because of old age or infirmity. To them also I

send the expression of my love in Christ Jesus. Their prayers, their wisdom, their suffering are rich treasures for the Church, from which will come forth abundant blessings.

7. And what of your contemporaries? Undoubtedly your acceptance of Christ's mission is a clear witness for those who are not yet sure what the Lord wants of them. You show them that being ordained for God's service is a noble vocation that demands faith, courage and self-sacrifice. I am sure that such qualities are to be found among the young people of Great Britain. To them I say: Be certain that Christ's call to the priesthood or religious life is addressed to some of you. Be certain that if you listen to his call and follow him in the priesthood or religious life, you will find great joy and happiness. Be generous, take courage and remember his promise: "My yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matth. 11, 30).

8. Finally, I wish to greet the parents and families of those about to be ordained. I say in the name of the Church, in the company of my fellow-Bishops, thank you for your generosity. It was you who brought these men into the world. It was you who first gave them the faith and the values that have helped to lead them to God's altar today. The Church, too, must be a family, bishops, priests, deacons, religious and laity, supporting each other and sharing with each other the individual gifts given by God. Every priest relies on the faith and talents of his parish community. If he is wise he will not only know the joy of dispensing God's grace, but also of receiving it abundantly through his parishioners as well. The partnership between priests and people is built upon prayer, collaboration and mutual respect and love. That has always been the tradition of these islands. May it never be lost.

9. Through this ordination the Lord really and truly continues the work of his "new creation." And he continues to send forth his message over all the earth and to speak personally to those who will be ordained: " 'Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you' – it is the Lord who speaks!" (Jer. 1, 7-8). Amen.

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