



CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

“Are you resolved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of the priesthood in the presbyteral order as a conscientious fellow worker with the Bishop in caring for the Lord's flock?”

(Pontificale Romanum. De Ordinatione Episcopi, presbyterorum et diaconorum, editio typica altera (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1990))

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

Keeping before our eyes and in our heart the spiritual experience of the inauguration of the Year for Priests during Vespers of the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, presided over by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in the Basilica of St. Peter on the 19th June last, it is with great joy that I address myself to all of you in this “holy time”, entrusting you to the Divine Providence.

During the course of the Year for Priests, by surveying the texts of the Liturgy of Ordination, I shall, towards the middle of each month, have the joy to offer a brief reflection which, coming from the heart and from a deep love of the Catholic Priesthood, I hope will be of some modest assistance to our shared meditation and be of “Christian and Priestly companionship” in this Year which, in union with the Successor of Peter, all of us wish will lead to a profound “spiritual renewal”.

The Church, in her maternal wisdom, has always taught that the ministry is born of the encounter of two freedoms: divine and human. If on the one hand one must always recall that, “no one claims this office for himself; he is called to it by God” (CCC n.1578), on the other hand, clearly, it is always a “human and created I”, with his own story and identity, with his own qualities and also his own limitations, who responds to the divine call.

The liturgical-sacramental translation of this asymmetric and necessary dialogue between the divine freedom which calls and the human freedom which responds is represented by the questions which each of us has had addressed to him by the Bishop during the rite our own ordination, immediately prior to the imposition of hands. We shall revisit together in the months ahead this “dialogue of love and freedom”.

We have been asked, “Are you resolved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of the priesthood in the presbyteral order as a conscientious fellow worker with the Bishop in caring for the Lord's flock?” We answered, “I Am”

The free and conscious response is based, therefore, on an explicit act of the will (“Are you resolved to discharge the office”, “I am”) which, as we know well, requires to be continuously enlightened by the judgement of reason and sustained by freedom, so as not to become a sterile voluntarism or, worse, to change over time, becoming unfaithful. The act of the will is enduring of its very nature, because it is a human act, in which the fundamental qualities of which the Creator has made us participants are expressed.

The undertaking, then, that we have assumed is “for the whole of life” and thus not related to fads or indulgences much less to sentiments, which might be apparent to a greater or less degree. While feelings may be said to have a role in coming to the knowledge of the truth, it is only

so as to direct out focus in such a way as not to obstruct such knowledge but to assist the discernment of it. Nevertheless, this is but one aspect of consciousness and cannot be its determining factor.

Our will has accepted to exercise “the priestly ministry”, not other “professions”! Above all else we are called to be priests always and, as the Saints remind us, in every circumstance, exercising with our very being that ministry to which we have been called. One does not merely act as a priest: one is a priest!

Let us renew, my dear brothers, in this Year for Priests, the deep feeling by which we awake each morning conscious of who we are, who the Lord has willed that we be in the Church: for Him; for His people; for our own eternal salvation!

Each one of us is part of a dynamic entity, called to collaborate by demonstrating, each in his own way, the Head of this Body: always as “fellow workers with the Bishop”, in obedience to the good which he indicates, and “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”, that is in praying with each breath. Only he who prays can hear the voice of the Spirit. As the Holy Father recalled in the General Audience of the 1st July last, “Those who pray are not afraid; those who pray are never alone; those who pray are saved!”.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the “all” and the “for ever”, help and protect us! Wishing you every blessing as we continue the Year for Priests,

✠Mauro Piacenza
Titular Archbishop of Vittoriana
Secretary

From the Vatican, 15th July 2009