

ADM 5355T

# *Address to Priests*

Hope Paul VI

JULY 3, 1966



*(Translation provided by NCWC News Service)*

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**National Catholic Welfare Conference**  
**1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.      Washington, D. C. 20005**

# *Address to Priests*

POPE PAUL VI

*Address to seventy new priests ordained by the  
Holy Father in St. Peter's Basilica  
July 3, 1966*

Revered brothers, beloved sons, it is impossible to separate the moment of reflection over the Word of God — which the Liturgy allows and in fact prescribes at this point of Holy Mass — from consideration of the circumstances in which this great rite is fulfilled.

These circumstances do not replace nor stifle the Word of God which, after all, alone deserves our attention. In fact, it seems to us that the circumstances in which we find ourselves help us to think and to understand what the Lord wants to say to us today; that to those who know how to capture the meaning of things and of time, they express something of His divine discourse, and serve as comment on the mysteries which we are celebrating.

The first circumstance is that of the place in which we find ourselves. No one can escape the inexhaustible spell of greatness, of beauty, and of sacred character of the edifice that welcomes us; truly the ancient epigraph, which gives a definition of the basilica where we are, repeats its praise in our minds: *iustitiae sedes, fidei domus, aula pudoris* (seat of justice, house of faith, temple of purity); but it does not restrain us from a spontaneous search for the focal point of this splendid vision.

At once the spirit, almost forgetful of all the rest, gathers around this altar, searching for its secret: Why here? Why is this monument here? Why is this flow of religious piety here, as though at one of its most attractive, most sacred and most inspiring centers?

Here is Peter, the place of his martyrdom and of his sepulchre; here is the Prince of the Apostles, he who received from Christ prophetic promises, they cannot be forgotten, here stands the foundation that does not yield and does not grow old, the foundation upon which rests all the edifice which Christ builds with every human material and throughout every century; here are the keys, the powers of the author of salvation, which is accomplished on earth and is celebrated in heaven.

And we are here, like travelers at the crossroads, there where every path of God's kingdom reaches and departs from, like scattered pilgrims who, on first arriving, discover themselves to be like brothers and like sons in this house; like anxious students wishing to seize at least a word from this chair, so as to make of it a seed of meditation throughout life.

We must not disregard an awareness of this circumstance, which our humble presence and paternal welcome, as the unworthy, however true, successor of that famous Peter, may render more stimulating, more sweet and memorable.

Afterwards, beloved sons, the other circumstance which obliges us to pause in most grateful and wondrous thought is you, whom we have just invested with the eternal priesthood of Christ.

You, who come from the seminaries of the Obra de Cooperacion Sacredotal Hispano-Americana, from the College of Louvain, from the United States; from the Pio Latino and Pio Brasiliano Colleges in Rome, from different religious communities; you, who come from the Seminary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was conceived and realized by the magnanimous heart of our revered brother, the bishop of Verona; which was promoted and supported by the contribution of this Apostolic

See and of the Italian episcopacy, together with other supporters, and which Catholic Italy, almost forgetful of its serious needs and lovingly lavish of its dearest treasures, dedicated to its sister nations of Latin America.

Latin America! There it stands at this moment before us. These new priests destined to it, many of whom already belong to it, have come here to prepare themselves, and are ready to return at once there as ministers of the Gospel. Let us foresee its immensity; the relatives of the newly ordained spur us to recall the many nations to which these new apostles will be sent; and the official representatives of the said nations who wished to attend this solemn rite offer to us a wonderful picture of their respective countries.

The importance of what we are completing, the sentiment which fills this ceremony with emotion and gladness, are such that a prophecy of love and of hope would want to issue forth from the heart to the lips: Latin America, this is your hour.

Latin America — faithful heir of the heritage of faith and of civilization which the ancient but not old Europe committed to you on the day of your independence, and which the Church, mother and teacher, has guarded with unusual love, at times superior to her powers of realization — now a new day enlightens your history: that of modern life, with all its vehement and astonishing problems; a life not paganly profane, not ignorant of the spiritual and transcendent destinies of man, but a life aware of your original vocation to form in a new and genial synthesis the ancient and the modern, the spiritual and the temporal, the gift of others and your own originality; a life, not uncertain, not weak, not slow, but a just, strong, free, Catholic life; an immense continent is yours.

The whole world awaits your testimony of energy, of wisdom, of social renewal, of concord and peace; a very new testimony of Christian civilization.

Brothers and sons who are listening to us, how may we dare speak such language? We could state the natural reasons

that impel us toward this. We know sufficiently the people of those lands to hold them in esteem and trust. You who will preach the Gospel there will experience the goodness of those peoples and their propensity to accept the higher truths, those that idealize human activity and the religious truths that inspire, guide, and sanctify it.

We will not say more at this time. We wish instead to say a word on the supernatural reason that invites us to do so. The supernatural reason is your priesthood, dear candidates for the holy ministry of Latin America.

We are in fact convinced that such a priesthood (and we speak of all priests, particularly of the bishops, who hold the fullness of the priesthood), possesses the treasure of light and of strength that can give to those populations the ability for renewal, development, and moral and civil order which is expected of them.

You are the light of the world, we will say to you with the word of our Lord. You are the salt of the earth. You are the ferment. You are the dispensers of the word and of grace. You are the shepherds and spiritual teachers of the people. You are the friendship, the gladness, the strength, the hope of souls. You are the comfort, the colleague, the support of him who suffers, of him who awaits justice, of him who is in need of repentance and reform.

Once again, you are the exponents of that active principle within the community of the faithful and of the neighboring society, which is the hierarchy, the ministerial priesthood, conceived by Christ at once as service and as authority, all of it devoted, to the point of sacrifice, to the good of others, and all of it transfigured by charisms and functions which only derive from above and which deserve from everyone respect and docility.

We have trust, we repeat, immense trust, that the priestly ministry is the source of salvation for the world; the Lord has so established. And we trust that it be so in special manner for the beloved countries of Latin America.

This is the reason why the effort is made of which you, the newly ordained, are the expression, the effort of pastoral collaboration. Such effort wants to do honor to the episcopacy and the clergy, who with such dedication already are laboring apostolically in those blessed lands. Such effort wants to manifest an act of solidarity by increasing there the number of priests and by offering the test of some useful ecclesiastical experience toward those good and promising Catholic communities.

This effort also wants to show that the wishes of the Ecumenical Council concerning reciprocal aid which the members of the Catholic Church must lend one another are not vain words, but are lively and active words which begin to bear their fruit.

And now, revered brothers and beloved sons, our thought should be fixed upon the Gospel text which the liturgy offers for our meditation. For reasons of brevity, we will dwell only upon one expression of Christ's discourse, the first of today's biblical selections, which begins: "unless your justice exceeds . . ."¹

You know this quotation, grave as a threat, exacting as a challenge, penetrating as an incision, original as a new program of moral perfection.

Christ is not content with a purely formal and external justice. Christ wants us good in a virtue that transforms us inwardly and which educates us continually toward an utmost sincerity of heart and action. If we superimpose this expression upon our priestly life, what stimulation, what compulsion toward perfection and toward sanctity!

Well then, the severe word of Jesus must not make us fearful, but encourage us instead to make of the priestly life a formula that leads toward sanctity. The priesthood exacts and generates sanctity. The justice that the Lord wishes from us is evangelical. You already know it well — the justice of charity, grace and divine mercy, received and dispensed.



That this be so, do not forget the golden maxim of your formation: to guard and nourish the inner life, above anything else. Silence, meditation, personal prayer; afterwards the liturgical and community prayer, which gives nourishment to the former and receives nourishment from it. Then, to know how to preserve oneself spotless even if immersed in pastoral and profane conversation; thus you will have the simple and virile asceticism which tempers the soul to personal strength, and clears the spirit from worldly enchantment. And furthermore, to know how to give oneself, in the ministry, in the search for the good of others, with sacrifice. Charity, charity; is not charity the way to sanctity for the priest destined to pastoral service?

And lastly Jesus! Jesus known well. Who can say that he has known Him sufficiently?

Jesus imitated; is this not the highest and most comprehensive norm of all our duties?

Jesus followed, where He wishes, as He wishes, even to Gethsemani, even to Calvary, with an obedience that renders great him who is humble.

Jesus announced: what joy, what honor, what greater merit than this?

Jesus lived: "For me to live is Christ" (*Mihi vivere Christus est*).<sup>2</sup> This is everything, beloved brothers and sons.

It is the priesthood. It is the mission. It is the mystery. It is hope. Now you may receive the final word: go! preach, baptize; go! Christ sends you; the Church awaits you, the world opens before you!

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<sup>1</sup> (Matt. 5:20).

<sup>2</sup> (Phil. 1:21).