

ORDINATION: A HOMILY

Cardinal F. Koenig

This is a translation of the text of a homily by Cardinal Koenig, Primate of Austria and President of the Pontifical Secretariate for Non-Believers at the ordination to the priesthood of sixty members of Opus Dei at the Shrine of our Lady of the Angels, Torreciudad, Spain on 15 August 1978.

We are celebrating the Solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady, the final and complete glorification of the Mother of God. Every feast of our Lady is an occasion of special joy for Christians. But, today, we have a very particular reason for our joy: the ordination to the priesthood of a sizeable group of members of Opus Dei. This is also a source of rejoicing for the whole Church.

We are here in Torreciudad, in this shrine which is fruit of the faith of Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer and of his love for our Lady. We are just a short distance from the old shrine where he, who by God's will was later to open a new and fruitful page in the

Church's history, was brought by his parents from Barbastro to thank our Lady for curing him.

And from the parents of Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer, whom the happy circumstances of the moment cause us to remember with admiration and gratitude, our thoughts go to the families of those who are about to be ordained priests, especially to their mothers and fathers. To them we send our congratulations on the honour and confidence God has shown them. We also send them the Church's thanks, for as the Founder of the Opus Dei always said, children owe ninety per cent of their vocation to their parents.

Today, another link is added to the admirable chain of priestly ordinations of men who have years of experience in the most varied social and professional work. This unbroken series is a great source of hope, especially in these times when the need for priests is felt keenly everywhere. While today's ordinations are but another link in the chain, they are somewhat special: they take place in the fiftieth year of Opus Dei's history, a year which the present President General of the Work has wanted to be a Marian year for the members of Opus Dei. We

now therefore place at our Lady's feet our thanksgiving for the foundation of Opus Dei, to which we add our thanksgiving for the new priests with whom God has pleased to enrich the Church.

All Christians possess the common priesthood of the faithful which they received in the sacrament of Baptism. These members of Opus Dei, like all the sons and daughters of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, have already been putting it into effect for many years, with 'a truly priestly soul and a fully lay mentality,' as their Founder constantly taught.

But the sacrament of Order confers a new manner of participating in the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and men (cf. 1 Tim 2, 5) – a manner which is essentially different from that of the common priesthood of the faithful. To be more specific: priests make Christ present on this earth as Head of the Church, from whom supernatural life comes down to men. And it is through him that that Sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, expiation and petition which is the Holy Mass, perpetuating that of the Cross to which is directed all the Church's life, is brought from men to God the Father.

The world urgently needs priests who will preach the Word of God with authority. Priests who 'speak only about God', as Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer used to say, who bring to men's minds the truth which saves and liberates (cf. Jn 8, 32); the only truth which can give meaning and value to life and death, to health and sickness, to joy and sorrow.

It is urgent that the priestly task of preaching and guiding souls be aimed principally at ensuring that people come well prepared to receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. In the words of our late Holy Father Pope Paul VI: 'a priest is ordained in the first place to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice, where he, "in the person of Christ and in the name of the Church", offers to God, in a sacramental manner, the Passion and Death of our Redeemer and, at the same time, makes of him supernatural, life-giving food for himself and for the faithful' (Allocution, 21 February 1966).

For the priest, as for all Christians, the Blessed Eucharist is the most important thing in this life, for, as the Founder of Opus Dei always taught and the Second Vatican Council took up and solemnly confirmed, the Holy Mass is the "centre and root" of the Christian life (cf. Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14).

Administering the sacrament of Penance is another principal function proper to the priest (cf. Decree

Presbyterorum Ordinis.¹³ In Confession the priest, who is Christ's instrument, is a Judge who dispenses divine mercy by pardoning sins. He also acts as Pastor, Teacher, Father and Healer of souls. In this world of ours which, as the Holy Father Paul VI pointed out, 'not only refuses to consider sin for what it is, but refuses even to speak of the subject' (Allocution 8 March 1972), the generous dedication of a priest to administering the sacrament of Penance will most certainly contribute to awakening that dormant consciousness of sin, to discovering the meaning of moral evil, an evil, however, from which God frees us by his mercy.

Dearly beloved brothers! You know very well what that priesthood is, which you are now about to receive, and also what your mission is. You know it, not only through your theological studies, but also because you have the grace of contemplating the life and receiving the teaching of a truly exemplary priest, your Founder, whom I too had the great fortune to meet personally and by whose friendship I was honoured.

So, I want to sum up in a few words my advice to you: in every circumstance of your priestly work, ask yourselves: How would our Father act? And with the grace of God, do the same. Imitate his unshakeable fidelity to God, to the Church and to the Pope, the steadfast tenderness of his piety, the depth and clarity of his theological and juridical teaching, the heroism of his self-surrender in his hard-working and energetic humility, the overflowing joy of his youthful heart.

As well as Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer, we all remember now his first successor as President General of Opus Dei, Very Rev. Dr Alvaro del Portillo. My thoughts go to him with deep gratitude for the honour and joy he has given my soul by inviting me to confer the priesthood on this group during this anniversary year of Opus Dei. For you especially, who are about to be ordained, Don Alvaro, who is now your Father in the Work, represents nothing less than the perfect example of a faithful son of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer. So you have, in your union and obedience to him, an immediate point of reference, a sure guide for your priestly ministry in the specific tasks of Opus Dei in which, from now on, you will continue to serve God, the Church, the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops, and all men.

Let us ask God, through the intercession of Holy Mary, *Turris Civitatis*, that it may be so.