

Priestly Ordinations

Thirteen deacons incardinated in the Prelature of Opus Dei received priestly ordination from the hands of their own Ordinary, Bishop Javier Echevarría, on Sunday, June 8, 1997. The ceremony took place in Rome in the parish of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. During his homily (reprinted below) the Prelate insisted on the need to pray for priestly vocations.

The new priests came from six countries: Argentina, England, France, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela.

Their names are: Jose María García Pou; Manuel Alberto No-

gueira de Costa Graça; Víctor Urrestarazu Villarroel; Santiago Martín Andrés; Guillaume Derville; Santiago Collado González; José Antonio Alonso Artero; Paul Anthony Diaper; Pablo María Casas Filiol-de-Raimond; Xavier Pont Camps; Rafael Díaz Dorronsoro; Juan Francisco Duque Chávez and Juan González Ayesta.

On May 17, 1997, the fifth anniversary of the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría conferred the diaconate on five faithful of the Prelature in the same parish of Blessed Josemaría in Rome.

Pastoral Letter January 1, 1997

In January, Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, sent the following pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature, in occasion of the first year of preparation for the jubilee of the year 2000.

Rome, 1 January 1997

My dearest children, may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

*Christus heri et hodie ipse et in sæcula!.*¹

1. Heb 13:8.

With these words from Sacred Scripture, the Holy Father, John Paul II, on the eve of the first Sunday of Advent opened the triennium of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, and I am using these same words to begin this first letter to you in the new year. I ask God that the months to come may be full of supernatural fruitfulness for each of us, for our apostolic works and for the whole of the Church. As we will always have God's grace, these expectations will be abundantly fulfilled if we embark on 1997 with a sincere desire for personal holiness and apostolate and, as a result, make a resolution to pursue that great ideal with all our strength, and to battle against the difficulties we may come across, both from within and from outside. I beg you not to let these desires remain just at the theoretical level.

*Militia est vita hominis super terram.*² The living tradition of the Church applies this thought to the interior battle of a Christian, and our beloved Father, Blessed Josemaría, continued the tradition by paraphrasing a popular saying, and teaching us: "A new year, a new struggle!" The period of time that is beginning now will bring with it a *newness of life*,³ if we really try and respond generously to God, because when he bestows his grace on someone, "it is as if he were stretching out his hand to us, in a fatherly way. It is a strong hand, full of love, because he seeks us out individually, as his own daughters and sons, knowing our weakness. The

Lord expects us to make the effort to take his hand, his helping hand."⁴ I ask our Creator and Redeemer that all the faithful of the Prelature and the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross may learn to respond to his love, throughout the year, with a total self-giving.

As the Shepherd of this *little portion of the Church* which God has entrusted to me, I feel it is my duty to send you some words of exhortation and encouragement that can help you to faithfully follow the Roman Pontiff's directives for this time of preparation immediately leading up to the jubilee of the year 2000. I also beg you to pass on the Holy Father's indications to all those who in one way or another receive spiritual help from the Prelature, and to your relatives, friends, colleagues at work, etc. Try to ensure that many souls prepare themselves in the best possible way to receive the great graces which the Church and the world are expecting on the occasion of the two thousandth year since the coming of the Son of God.

The starting point for this long preparation time, leading up to a new century, is an impetus for us to consider in greater depth something that the Holy Father never ceases proclaiming: that Christ is *the Lord of history and the fullness of time*, the vertex and summit of the whole of humanity and all creation. "The millenniums belong to Christ; all the millenniums of history, but especially

2. Job 7:1.

3. Cf Rom 6:4.

4. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 17.

the two that we have counted since his coming into the world. This second millennium of the Christian era, whose end we are rapidly approaching, belongs to him, while the beginning of the third is already imminent: *Tertio millennio adveniente*.”⁵

Our Lord is the master of both the visible and invisible world, of both time and eternity, because he is the Son of the Eternal Father, who has taken on human nature for us. When he became incarnate, he “took possession of our time, in all its dimensions, and opened it to eternity. Eternity, in fact, is God’s own dimension. By becoming man, the Son of God embraced human time with his humanity, to guide man through all the measures of this time towards eternity and to lead him to participation in the divine life, the true inheritance of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁶

This conviction should always radiate from our souls and light up our earthly journey day after day. Our beloved Founder used to remind us insistently about this, as at Christmas time in 1972, when he told us, “My daughters and sons, it is Christ who draws all creatures to himself: *all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made* (John 1:3). And on

becoming man, and coming to live among us (cf John 1:14), he has shown us that we are not in this life to seek a passing, temporal happiness. We are here to reach eternal happiness, following in his footsteps. And we will only attain this by learning from him.”⁷

On his daily journey towards God, Blessed Josemaría kept presenting to Christians certain “very clear stages” which should be completed, one day after another, in order to achieve a true and deep friendship with the Holy Trinity: to seek Christ, to find Christ, and to love Christ.⁸

Jesus Christ is the one way that links heaven and earth together, as he himself has taught us: *I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by Me*.⁹ In these first twelve months of preparation for the Jubilee, the Roman Pontiff is trying to rekindle this fundamental conviction in all the children of the Church. When pointing out that this period of time is dedicated “to reflection on Christ, the Word of God, made man by the power of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁰ John Paul II proposes to Christians a spiritual program which, thanks to a greater knowledge of the life and work of the Incarnate Word, leads them to praise the Most Holy Trinity, the ultimate goal of our

5. JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the beginning of the triennium of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.

6. JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the beginning of the triennium of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.

7. BLESSED JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, Meditation, *Time for thanksgiving*, 25-XII-1972 (AGP, P01 1973, p. 8).

8. Cf *The Way*, no. 382.

9. John 14:6.

10. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 10-XI-1994, no. 40.

existence. "The whole program of preparation for the third millennium must help us discover the glory of God revealed in Christ."¹¹

In these days of the Christmas season, when we reflect on the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation, we have often renewed our desire to respond fully to God's love, and we have asked our Lord to help us, because *sine me nihil potestis facere*.¹² we can do nothing without Jesus. Now too, in this first preparatory stage leading us to the new millennium, we raise our prayer of petition to heaven with the sense that—by virtue of a solidarity that intimately unites us to Christ—we are representatives of all the people who live in this world of ours: men and women, rich and poor, young, old and even children, Christians and non-Christians; and we take up the prayer composed by the Pope for this occasion: "Lord Jesus, You who are the fullness of time and Lord of history, prepare our hearts to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 with faith, so that it may be a year of grace and mercy. Make our hearts humble and simple, so that we may contemplate with renewed wonder the mystery of the Incarnation by which You, the Son of the Most High, became our Brother, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the temple of the Holy Spirit."¹³

Every day we should renew our

grateful amazement at the wonderful things (and they are truly astounding) that Almighty God has carried out among men, and is still doing so; especially the great marvel of the Incarnation of the Word in Mary's virginal womb. This mystery is at the very heart of our faith, and if we consider it attentively in our prayer, it will arouse in us a sense of profound gratitude and adoration, and a desire to make reparation. At the same time, it offers us a perennial lesson, a wonderful example. As our Father used to remind us, "You must look at the Child in the manger. He is our Love. Look at him, realizing that the whole thing is a mystery. We need to accept this mystery on faith and use our faith to explore it very deeply."¹⁴ Let us not forget, my daughters and sons, as our Founder also used to tell us so often, that in order for us to understand such a mystery in greater depth it is essential to have this attitude of simplicity and humility that the Pope recommends to us now. We have to awaken in ourselves an awareness of our littleness before God, and, at the same time, rest assured that we are his children, and dearly loved children, whom our heavenly Father contemplates tenderly.

Let us consider attentively this divine exchange by which God takes on what is ours—our mortal human nature, sufferings and sins, taking this burden onto himself!—and in

11. JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the beginning of the triennium of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.

12. *John*, 15:5.

13. JOHN PAUL II, Prayer for the first year of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.

14. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 13.

exchange, gives us his immortality, happiness, and Life. "He has become a child," exclaims St. Ambrose, "so that you can reach perfect manhood. He has been wrapped in swaddling clothes so that you can be released from the bonds of death. He has been laid in a manger so that you can be raised to the altars. He has been put on earth so that you can be above the stars. There was no room for him at the inn, so that there would be many mansions for you in heaven."¹⁵ Yes, my daughters and sons, let us ask God for "*a humble and simple heart*," so that we may never at any moment get used to God's fatherly and motherly kindness; and let us do everything we can so that other people may also discover this and be full of gratitude to the Holy Trinity.

In order to get to know and love Christ, it is absolutely essential to know what our Lord did and taught in the course of his life on earth. This is why the Roman Pontiff strongly advises that "Christians, especially in the course of this year, *should turn with renewed interest to the Bible*,"¹⁶ where we hear God's voice resounding through both the Old and New Testaments. "Ignorance of Sacred Scripture is ignorance of Christ"¹⁷ declared St. Jerome long ago. And the Second Vatican Council recommends that all the faithful should read Holy Scripture assiduously in order to acquire *the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ*.¹⁸

In Opus Dei we are following this recommendation of the Church with what I would call an inherent joy, because already, from 1928 onwards, our Founder had arranged things so that his daughters and sons would receive the formation of a doctrinal piety that is rooted in and constantly nourished by Sacred Scripture, read and understood within the Tradition of the Church. By taking part every day in the Holy Mass; having recourse habitually to the pages of the Gospels and the liturgical texts, like threads with which we weave our personal prayer; reading the New Testament daily; going to classes of dogmatic and spiritual theology which everyone studies at the appropriate times; revising in an orderly way our knowledge of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and so on, we come into daily contact with the Word of God, "that enlightens and enkindles, feeds and consoles,"¹⁹ as the Holy Father declares. We have also learned from Blessed Josemaría (and it is a tradition that should never be broken) to *place ourselves* personally in the scenes in the Holy Gospel, "*as one more character*" there, and in this way to really pray. I would like you to reflect on how you look after your reading, meditating on it; to check whether you read those texts slowly and carefully, so that they serve as a sort of background canvas for your presence of God; and to examine and see whether these teachings come spontaneously into your conversa-

15. ST. AMBROSE, *Commentary on St Luke's Gospel* 2, 41.

16. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 10-XI-1994, no. 40.

17. ST. JEROME, *Commentary on the prophet Isaiah*, Prol.

18. Phil 3:8, Cfr. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Const. *Dei Verbum*, no. 25.

19. JOHN PAUL II, Prayer for the first year of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.

tions. Let us not forget that Jesus, the Word become flesh, lives and talks to us with all the power —the same power as always— of his revealed doctrine.

And so we will have no shortage of opportunities for increasing our knowledge of Holy Scripture and savoring its teachings. The important thing, my daughters and sons, is for each of us, in an especially intense way this year, to really try and take advantage of all the means we are offered for knowing Christ better, and thus to talk to him and love him, in accordance with the measure of grace that the Paraclete grants to each of us, until we achieve “the frenzy of love that teaches how to suffer and how to live, because God has given us the gift of Wisdom.”²⁰

Before finishing, I must tell you that the recent pastoral journey to the Far East which I had the joy of undertaking together with everyone’s prayers and intentions, has helped to increase still more my concern for the apostolate. How many millions of souls —in China, Japan and so many other countries in this beloved continent of Asia— are still, after twenty centuries, unaware of the *good news* of the Incarnation of the Son of God! Let us pray a lot, let us pray even more, with our hearts, our words, and the work of our hands, so that what the Holy Father is asking for in his prayer of petition, preparing for

the forthcoming jubilee, may be fulfilled: “Oh Word of the living God, renew the Church’s missionary zeal, so that all nations may come to know you, the true Son of God and true Son of man, the one Mediator between man and God.”²¹

Intensify your prayer during the coming octave for the unity of Christians, and pray to the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of that other great aspiration of the Roman Pontiff and of the whole of the Church: the union, in only one flock and under one supreme Shepherd, of all those who acknowledge Christ. May the Lord of time and history, through the intercession of his most holy Mother, deign to bring forward the moment for the full communion of all Christians in the one Church that He founded.

Finally, let me ask you, as always, to pray very much for my intentions. I thank God with all my heart for the certainty that you are fully with me and therefore I don’t tire of asking you to support me. Right now, keep very much in mind those faithful of the Prelature, your brothers, who are going to receive the diaconate at my hands, on 25 January.

With a most affectionate blessing from

Your father

+ Javier

20. BLESSED JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, Meditation, *Our way on earth*, 26-XI-1967 (AGP, P01 1972, p. 729).

21. JOHN PAUL II, Prayer for the first year of preparation for the Great Jubilee in the year 2000, 30-XI-1996.