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Audience of the Holy Father with deacons to be ordained priests of the diocese of Rome

The following is the address prepared by the Holy Father Francis for the deacons to be ordained priests of the diocese of Rome, to be considered as delivered:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers,

Thank you for being here. I greet Bishop Di Tolve, and I welcome every one of you, pleased to meet you in this time that precedes your priestly ordination.

I imagine that, thinking of that day, you will already be “studying” the rite of ordination! Well, the first question you will be asked about the commitments you will profess to make, reads: “Do you resolve, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank, as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord’s flock?” In these words, I seem to see three essential elements in the ministry: first of all being *faithful fellow workers*, then being *in the service of the people of God*, and finally being *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*. I will dwell briefly on these three points.

Faithful fellow workers. One can have the idea that, once one becomes a priest, it is essentially time to take matters into one’s own hands, personally implementing what one had desired for years, finally setting up situations with one’s own style and according to one’s own ideas, those held most dear according to one’s personal history and journey. Yet the Holy Mother Church first of all does not ask you to be leaders, but co-workers, that is, according to the meaning of the words, those who “work *with*”. This *with* is essential, because the Church, as the Council recalls, is first and foremost a *mystery of communion*. And the priest is a witness to this communion, which implies fraternity, fidelity and docility. Choristers, in short, not soloists; brothers in the presbyterate and priests for all, not for their own group; ministers always in perpetual formation, never thinking of being autonomous and self-sufficient. How important it is today to continue your formation, and not alone, but always in contact with those who, called to accompany you, have travelled further in the ministry; and to do so

with openness of heart, so as not to give in to the temptation to manage life alone, thus becoming easy prey to the most varied temptations.

Second aspect: *in the service of the people of God*. I like to meet you now, while you are deacons, because one does not become a pastor without first being a deacon. The diaconate does not disappear with priesthood: on the contrary, it is the foundation on which it is based. You will be priests in order to serve, conforming with Jesus who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life” (cf *Mk* 10:45). I would say, then, that there is an inner foundation of priesthood to be preserved, which we could call “*diaconal conscience*”: just as conscience underlies decisions, so the spirit of service underlies being a priest. So, every morning it is good to pray asking to know how to serve: “Lord, today help me to serve”; and every evening, giving thanks and making an examination of conscience, to say: “Lord, forgive me when I thought more of myself than of serving others”. But to serve, dear friends, is a verb that refuses all abstraction: to serve means to be available, to renounce living according to one's own agenda, to be ready for God's surprises that manifest themselves through people, the unexpected, changes of plan, situations that do not fit into our schemes and the “rightness” of what one has studied. Pastoral life is not a manual, but rather a daily offering; it is not a desk job, but rather a “Eucharistic adventure”. It is about repeating with life, first hand, “This is my body, given for you”. It is a constant attitude, made up of acceptance, compassion, tenderness, a style that speaks with deeds rather than with words, expressing the language of proximity. It is not about caring for people for ulterior motives, even the best ones, but about recognizing in them the unique and wonderful gifts that the Lord has given to serve them, with joy, with humility. It is the joy of accompanying their steps, taking them by the hand, with patience and discernment. And it is in this light that, with the grace of God, one overcomes the danger of harbouring within ourselves some bitterness and dissatisfaction with things that do not go as we would like, when people do not meet our expectations and do not conform to our aspirations.

And now we come to the final aspect: *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*. It is important to give primacy to the Spirit, who will descend on you. If this happens, your life, as it was for the Apostles, will be oriented towards the Lord and by the Lord, and you will truly be “men of God”. Otherwise, when one counts on one's own strength, one risks finding oneself empty-handed. Life *under the guidance of the Holy Spirit*: this means passing from the anointing of ordination to a “daily anointing”. And Jesus pours out on us the anointing of the Spirit when we are in His presence, when we adore Him, when we are intimate with His Word. Staying with Him, remaining with Him (cf. *Jn* 15), then also allows us to intercede before Him for the Holy People of God, for humanity, for the people we meet every day. In this way, with a heart that draws its own joy from the Lord and makes relationships fruitful with prayer, does not lose sight of the timeless beauty of priestly life.

This I wish for you, dear brothers, thanking you for your “yes” to God and asking you, please, to pray for me every day.
