

POPE'S HOMILY AT ORDINATION OF 19 BISHOPS*

CHARISM OF THE BISHOP EXPRESSED IN THE TRIPLE PASTORAL FUNCTION

This liturgical rite unfolds in two psychological stages. One stirs us to express our sentiments and thoughts, urging us to prayer, wherein we offer up to God our praise and invocations. The other imposes on us silence and quiet and disposes us to accept the inner voice of the Spirit. The first speaks to God. The other listens to Him. This second stage is now here. It is inserted into the prayers and gestures of this great ceremony, and bids us be silent and attentive. The first is active, the second is passive. But this second state, presenting nothing to God except attentive openness, waits for God to grant the gift of his active presence. Like a boatman ceasing to pull at the oars and letting the wind fill the sail and carry his boat along, each of us grows quiet in a moment of interior repose and gives himself up to the breath of the Spirit so as to hear his silent but impelling words.

"HERE SPEAKS PETER'S TOMB"

1. We listen. We listen to the mysterious voice of mute things which become eloquent as they express their spiritual meaning. We listen to what this famous and yet ever mysterious place is saying. It is the "trophy" of a tomb, the tomb that preserves the relics of the Apostle Peter. We are gathered over the tomb of him whom Christ changed from the lowly

* On Sunday, 13 February, the Holy Father conferred episcopal Ordination on 19 recently appointed Bishops from various countries of the world. The ceremony took place in St. Peter's Basilica, and the co-consecrators were Cardinal Alfrink, Archbishop of Utrecht, and Cardinal Conway, Archbishop of Armagh. This is a translation of the Pope's homily which he delivered in Latin.

weak Simon, son of Jonah, into Peter: the foundation upon which he, Christ, prophesied that he would build an indestructible edifice, "his Church".

The things we see, the things around us — are they not perhaps speaking? Do they not have an eloquent message to impart, even in the wordless materiality of their presence? There should be no need for us to speak. The message is here, we repeat; one need but listen to it. Here speaks Peter's Tomb, which holds the poor but triumphant remains of the Fisherman of Galilee. Here speaks the fact that we are gathered together, as members of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church, firmly bound together, in spite of differences of origin, language and mentality, by the faith we express unanimously in the Creed. Does not the sacrament of apostolic succession, which we are celebrating, thus manifest itself historically and almost tangibly? Are not the bishops the successors of the Apostles, not merely juridically, but also as heirs in an ever-living communion of life-giving and ministry? And is not the first of the Apostles, Simon Peter, teaching us in this Basilica which is dedicated to him, in accordance with the prophecy of his first letter (cfr. 2:4-10)?

WITNESSES AND TEACHERS OF THE FAITH

In that letter it is clear that his special position is but a vicarious sacrament of the true and first living stone, Christ himself, the head of the spiritual family, in which all that is joined to him also comes alive and becomes a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, won for the design of light and mercy that begets the People of God. Is there not thus an organic and harmonious significance in the distinction and the kingship between the common priesthood of the faithful — who make up with us the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church — and our ministerial episcopal priesthood, into which is poured in fullness the power of being depositories and transmitters of the mysteries of God?

Here the economy of the apostolic succession, we mean the hierarchical and ministerial one, becomes almost historically and tangibly evident for all present. But it impresses more strongly upon the minds of us bishops an awareness of our having been raised to the apostolic calling, that is, to the function of being witnesses and teachers of the faith, to the mission

of being transmitters of grace, and to the awesome but loving responsibility of being pastors. Let us be filled with this higher understanding of ordination, which marks us with the priestly character of Christ.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION AND GUARANTEE

2. But we listen to something else that flows, as a logical, historical, spiritual and real eloquence, from this mysterious and irrefutable fact of the apostolic succession: what ought also to occupy our minds this morning is the unity which results from that fact. The Church, which is founded upon the Apostles, comes from an eternal plan of God the Father who, through the ancient Covenant, chose his People, the heir of the messianic promises, and gathered it together through the sacrifice of his only Son, through the rite of the new Covenant. The apostolic succession is the guarantee of that unity, for which Christ died and rose again (cfr. Jn. 11:52): the bishops preside over the particular or individual local churches which, though separate in time and space, do not cease to be the one single People of God, just as God is one, God who calls them and sanctifies them.

In the awareness of the universality of the Church is rooted the awareness of her unity: "There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God, who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all" (Eph. 4:4-6). This consciousness has sustained the Church through the centuries of her history, beyond every break, every schism. The universal Church and the particular churches; the Successor of Peter and the successors of the Apostles: this is the living language of history, which we are listening to here today, in its living reality and authenticity. It strengthens us all and brings us peace.

CHARISM AND AUTHORITY COINCIDE

3. We are hearing yet another mysterious voice, which carries on the train of the earlier reflections. It is the voice of the charism of the pastoral power conferred upon the bishops of the Church of God according to the precise will of Christ and the disposition of the Holy Spirit (cfr. Acts 20:28): "the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers to feed the Church of

God". The interior and exterior charism of the bishop is therefore that of being called to the leadership of that part of the flock which has been entrusted to him and which belongs to the one Church. It unfolds in the exercise of the triple pastoral function of magisterium, ministry and guidance. We are aware that in these recent times some have ventured to contrast the charismatic Church and the hierarchical Church, as though it were a matter of two distinct bodies, indeed contrasting and opposed bodies. In fact, in pastoral power, charism and authority coincide. We have received the Holy Spirit, who in the episcopal mission manifest himself: in this combination of magisterium, assisted by the light of the Paraclete, of ministry, which sanctifies through his grace, and of ruling, in the charity of service. These are all powers of the bishop and also gifts of the Spirit. It is the voice of Paul who reminds us of this and confirms it: "There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them" (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

CHARISMS OF FAITHFUL SUBJECT TO DISCIPLINE

From the one Triune God comes the one Church, for which the Bishops have the primary responsibility, sharing as they do an attribute which is at the same time charismatic and hierarchical. The particular charisms of the faithful are not of course denied—quite the contrary. The same passage from the first letter to the Corinthians presupposes and recognizes these charism, for the Church is a living organism animated by the very life of God, a life which is mysterious and many-sided, unforeseeable and various, a life which sanctifies and transforms. But the charism which are granted to the faithful, as Paul also emphasizes (cfr. 1 Cor. 14:26-33, 40), are subject to discipline, which is ensured only by the charism of the pastoral power, in charity.

This mission, which has been conferred upon the college of bishops, obliges us to reflect upon the Church and likewise upon the world, at whose service God has placed us. In the Church we are the means for bringing life to the family of God, and we are called, like Christ and in imitation and following of Him (Jn. 15:16), to give service and sacrifice in daily

immolation for the flock, at the same time ensuring for it security, communion, joy and all gifts of the Spirit (cfr. Gal. 5:22-23). This is a wonderful, a tremendous, an exhilarating vision of our place in the Church; we must ensure the Church's unity, in the obedience and love of our dear sons and daughters! To be able to do this, we must remember that we have been in a certain way set apart, selected: "chosen to preach the Good News" (Rom. 1:1).

The demands of our ministry require a total gift of self and sever us from every binding or ambiguous tie with the world. At the same time they make us realize that we have been set up for the world, for its raising and sanctification, for its spiritual enlivening and consecration. Woe to the shepherd who should forget even one sheep, for he will be called to give an account of all: it is the tradition of Scripture, of the Prophet and of the Gospels that reminds us of this with frightening severity. Christ's love, which has conferred upon us the charism of pastoral authority, has granted us this charism for the sake of all men, and especially "for those who have strayed in any way from the path of truth or who are ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and his saving mercy" (*Christus Dominus, 11*).

Dear brothers, sons and daughters.

These are the words that resound in our ears today in this Basilica, at the Tomb of Peter, in the midst of the praying assembly here present. We have sought to express them, though we have gathered only a part of the richness of the message that they bring us. But the meditation continues: for you bishops especially, "brothers, who are delegates of the churches, a real glory to Christ" (2 Cor. 8:23), so that, to use again the words of Saint Paul, you may know how "to comfort yourselves in the house of God, which is the Church of the Living God, upholder and protector of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). It is our wish for each other that the commitment to treasure this hour of grace, will not stop here. As we continue the Mass, united to Christ, High Priest and Shepherd, who sanctifies and presents us all to the Father in the renewal of the one redemptive sacrifice, we shall ask him to give us an understanding of that sacrifice that is ever more loving, more attentive, more complete. And with understanding, may he give us also the grace to live our vocation, in communion with the People of God.