



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AGLI ALUNNI DELLA PONTIFICIA ACCADEMIA ECCLESIASTICA****

Lunedì, 18 gennaio 1988

Dear Brother Priests,

I receive you with joy on the day following the feast of St Anthony, Abbot, a distinguished example of holiness in God's Church, whom you honor as patron of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy.

A week ago, the Church, when celebrating the Baptism of the Lord, meditated upon his prophetic, priestly and kingly mission. It was a mission which the Father entrusted to Christ, and which, through the action of the Holy Spirit, leads him to Calvary, where he fulfils the supreme act of his love.

The whole Church is associated with Christ in his mission of salvation. Jesus, the Saviour of the world, wishes his Church to be always near him; so you, dear friends, have been called by Christ himself to participate in his salvific mission. This is the meaning both of your baptism and of your priestly ordination, as well as what they demand of you.

Besides, the Holy See has called you to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy to prepare adequately to share in its specific task – that of Peter – to serve the Gospel and the Church. A particular form of sharing in Christ's salvific mission is entrusted to you.

The awareness of being called to serve very close to the ministry of Peter, completely devoted to the mission of Christ and of the Church, must be for you the greatest motivation of your life. To understand this mission and the way best suited to accomplish it, you must look to Christ the Priest at every moment of your formation.

I gladly take this opportunity to thank you for having placed your youth at the disposal of the

Church and of the Holy See. I would like to encourage you to follow with ever-growing enthusiasm and commitment the path you have taken, because your response to the call you have received is so important for the life of the Church.

What is the path in question? It is the path of sacrifice; the path of sacrificial love. Almost two years ago, speaking to the students of the Academy, I recalled that your priestly vocation includes also your call to be "victims of love with Christ Crucified" and that, by living thus, "you will discover the secret of your success not only in the spiritual sphere but also in the diplomatic area, as true representatives of the Church and of the Holy See" (Address of 6 June 1986).

The call of the Holy See demands the full and total generosity of complete abandonment to the will of the Father, following Christ, the divine model: "I always do what is pleasing to him". The will of the Father is the salvation of the world achieved through the sacrificial love of Christ. The human model of this generosity is that of Mary: a boundless generosity lived whether in darkness or the radiant light of faith. A "yes" lived according to the example of Christ and his Mother, which requires generous, total love.

Dear priests, this is the Church's ideal. This is the Holy See's ideal. This must be the essential programme of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy. The Holy See expects to find this love in you. This love will be a source of great spiritual freedom for you; it will show itself in joyful fidelity to the duties of everyday life. Sustained by this love and spiritual freedom, at the end of your preparation in the Academy you will be ready to go wherever your presence is required, and to fulfil, with God's help, whatever the Church will ask of you for Christ's kingdom. This love and spiritual freedom are the conditions necessary so that you may be able to collaborate with the right intentions and effectively in the specific task of the Holy See, without seeking honours and personal advantages.

Your priestly lifestyle must always show the dignity and the nobility of your mission and also the close relationship which you have with the Apostolic See. St Paul's words apply to all of us: "I beg you... to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1, 3).

Dear brother priests, the measure of your success is truly supernatural. Your sharing in Christ's mission, even in the particular context of the Holy See's mission, will succeed to the extent that your lives are rooted in Christ. This is all the more true since the Holy See's *raison d'être* is to preserve the Church's most sublime mysteries, her unity and charity.

This is the prospect of service which opens up before you; it requires supernatural vision and means, and demands total dedication on your part. This dedication is shown today in the seriousness of your human, spiritual, cultural, and pastoral preparation.

One of your greatest joys will be the awareness of working under the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church. I ask of Mary for you that the richest fruit of this Marian Year which you will spend in the Academy may be the renewal of your community in intimate union with Christ and in intense participation in the mystery of salvation, especially in the Eucharist, which is "the centre of your life and work".

As a sign of my trust and affection in Christ, I bless you in his name.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.6 pp.17, 18.*

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