

## *HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C*

In today's second reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to Timothy we hear the beautiful words that should remind everyone of us of the great gift of priesthood. Paul asks Timothy "to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (V. 6). I invite you to reflect on the amazing Church we belong to, that is the Catholic Church that is Apostolic. It is through the laying on of hands during the rite of ordination that we as priests are connected to the origin of our Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is Apostolic because the priests that minister to the people of God were anointed and consecrated to serve and through the laying on of hands of a validly ordained Bishop the priest can find his "Spiritual" genealogy with one of the apostles.

Priesthood, as well as marriage, is a vocation of service to the people of God in an unselfish way. "The question of the call to an exclusive gift of self to God in virginity and celibacy plunges its roots deeply into the evangelical soil of the theology of the body" (TOB 73:1). This Church, yours and mine is apostolic, as well, because after two thousand years we still believe and teach the doctrine that has been handed down to us through centuries by the apostles. The priest in a faithful way continues putting into practice the advise that Saint Paul gave to Timothy two thousand years ago "follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (v. 13).

Jesus, the embodied Word of God, said "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (Jn. 15:16). This reminds us that a vocation is always an initiative of God. From the beginning of humanity until our present days God continues calling people to different vocations in life, but there is a common vocation of all human beings, that vocation is holiness, and we find our path to sanctity in the particular vocation we choose to follow. The particular vocation is a choice, because we have to be free to accept it. If someone is forced into marriage that matrimony is rendered invalid. If a man is forced into priesthood he will be unhappy and will make others unhappy. In both vocations it is God who initiates the call and the human being is the one who freely answers to the initiative of God. It is not because "it is not advantageous to marry, nor because of a supposedly negative value of marriage that continence is observed by those who make such a choice 'for the kingdom of heaven' in their lives, but in view of the particular value which is connected with this choice and which one must discover and welcome as one's own vocation" (TOB 73:3). In the Latin rite of the Catholic Church the priest is called to "celibacy for the kingdom" and this is a vocation as well. When a man is called to the priesthood he freely embraces the vocation to celibacy.

TOB teaches that the priest is not only the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, but also a husband who lays down his life for his bride and makes her holy. The priesthood is all about serving the Bride: providing for her through the sacraments and protecting her from sin. For her sake, the priest freely denies himself marriage and embraces continence, giving himself exclusively to the souls entrusted to him as a husband does to his wife. This giving of himself, in service to the people that has been entrusted to him, has to be done happily.

I would like to emphasize the need of happiness in the ministry of the priest. God wants us to be happy and holy; these two terms are not opposed to each other. There is no reason to be unhappy when we live our vocation to the priesthood or marriage in a spirit of gratitude and generosity; gratitude for what we have, "a treasure that we hold in earthen vessels," and for the opportunity "to be in his presence and minister to Him." The human answer to this gift and mystery of the priesthood that we received by the laying on of hands of the bishop is generous service. This service to the Church, which makes a priest happy, is shown when he wakes up every day having his spouse, the Church, in mind and asking himself, "what can I do today to better serve the people of God entrusted to me?" This also applies to a married man or woman, waking up every morning having his or her spouse in mind and asking himself or herself, "how can I please my spouse today? How can I make him or her holier and happier even when I have to sacrifice my personal desires or inclinations?"

The one thing we can never escape, and which is embodied in the priesthood and in marriage, is that we are ultimately made for, belong to, and will return to God. While we are in this side of heaven let us live a holy and happy life by giving ourselves totally in service to others. Let us strive to walk the path of holiness in this year of faith in gratitude to God for making us members of the apostolic Church.



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