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Holy Mass with Episcopal Ordinations

At 17.00 today, on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Father Francis presided at Holy Mass in the Vatican Basilica during which he conferred episcopal ordination to three presbyters: Bishop Waldemar Stanisław Sommertag of the clergy of the diocese of Pelplin, Poland; Msgr. Alfred Xuereb of the clergy of the diocese of Gozo, Malta; and Msgr. José Avelino Bettencourt of the clergy of the archdiocese of Ottawa, Canada.

The homily given by the Holy Father during the celebration of the Eucharist is essentially the ritual homily provided for in the Italian edition of the Roman Pontifical for the Ordination of Bishops, to which, however, he as usual added some of his own considerations:

Homily of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sons,

It will do us good to carefully consider the great ecclesial responsibility to which these brothers of ours have been called. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father to redeem the human race, in turn sent the Twelve Apostles into the world so that, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they might preach the Gospel to all people and unite them under one shepherd, and that they might sanctify them and guide them to salvation.

In order to perpetuate this apostolic ministry from one generation to the next, the Twelve chose other men to share in their work. Through the laying on of hands, they passed on to them the gift of the Spirit which they themselves had received from Christ, thereby conferring the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders. Thus, through an uninterrupted succession of bishops this earliest ministry has been preserved in the living Tradition of the Church, and the work of the Saviour continues and develops up to our own day.

In the bishop surrounded by his priests, the same Lord Jesus Christ, the high Eternal High Priest, is present in your midst. For it is Christ Who, through the ministry of the bishop, continues to preach the Gospel of salvation

and to sanctify believers by means of the sacraments of faith. It is Christ Who, through the paternal role of the bishop, draws new members to his body, which is the Church. It is Christ Who, in the wisdom and prudence of the bishop, guides the People of God along their pilgrimage here on earth until at last they reach eternal bliss.

Therefore, welcome with gratitude and joy these brothers of ours, whom we bishops are about to receive into the episcopal college by the laying on of hands. Render to them the honour that is owed to the minister of Christ and the dispenser of the mysteries of God, to whom the testimony of the Gospel and the ministry of the Spirit for sanctification have been entrusted. Remember the words of Jesus to the Apostles: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects Him Who sent me".

As for you, dearest brothers, chosen by the Lord, consider that you have been chosen from among men and for men; you have been appointed to the things pertaining to God. Not for other things. Not for business, not for social life, not politics. Indeed, episcopacy is the name of a service, not of an honour, since the bishop must strive to serve rather than to rule, according to the Master's commandment: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all". Flee from the temptation to become princes.

Proclaim the Word at every opportune and inopportune occasion. Admonish, rebuke, but always with kindness; exhort unflinching in patience and teaching. And through the prayer and offering of sacrifice for your people, draw from the fullness of the holiness of Christ the manifold riches of God. The bishop's prayer: the first task of the bishop. When the widows of the Hellenists went to the apostles to complain because they did not care so much about them, they came together and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they invented the diaconate. And Peter, when he explains this, what does he say? "You do this, this and this; and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word" (cf. *Acts* 6: 1-7). The bishop's first task is prayer. A bishop who does not pray does not do his duty, does not fulfil his vocation.

In the Church entrusted to you, be loyal guardians and dispensers of the mysteries of Christ. As the Father has placed you at the head of His family, always follow the example of the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and is known by them, and who does not hesitate to give his life for them.

With your heart, love with a fatherly and brotherly love all those whom God entrusts to you: first the presbyters and deacons, your collaborators in the ministry. Closeness to priest, please: may they find the bishop on the very day they seek him, or at most the next day. Closeness to priests. But also to the poor, the defenceless and those in need of acceptance and help. Exhort the faithful to cooperate in the apostolic commitment and listen to them willingly.

Remember that you must pay careful attention to those who do not belong to the one fold of Christ, because they too been entrusted to you in the Lord. Remember that in the Catholic Church, brought together in the commitment to charity, you are united to the College of Bishops and you must carry within you the solicitude of all Churches, caring generously for those who are most in need of help.

And watch, watch lovingly over the whole flock, among whom the Holy Spirit places you in order to support the Church of God: in the name of the Father, Whose image you make present; in the name of Jesus Christ His Son, by Whom you were constituted a teacher, priest and shepherd; in the name of the Holy Spirit, Who gives life to the Church and Whose power sustains our weakness.
