

# Mass for Vocations to Holy Orders

My brother priests, and dear friends in Christ,

## **I. Introduction**

I'm delighted to welcome all of you here to Rome and to the Pontifical North American College as we begin together this pilgrimage to the Eternal City. Our time in Rome will culminate on Friday, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, during a Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica during which all the newly appointed metropolitan archbishops from all over the world, and I among them, will receive the Pallium from the hands of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI.

And the Pallium, about which you'll be hearing a lot in the coming days, is a circular band of wool, worn around the neck by the Pope and by the archbishops who head the archdioceses throughout the world. The Pallium is emblazoned with four crosses. It symbolizes the communion of faith and love between the Archbishops of the world and the Holy Father, and as it rests on the shoulders of an archbishop, it evokes his mandate to imitate the Good Shepherd in seeking out the lost sheep and carrying the lost sheep, on his shoulders, back to the fold, and back to abundant life.

## **II. The North American College**

So this place in which we now celebrate Mass, the North American College, was founded in 1859 by Blessed Pius IX, as a place for young men from the United States to be formed for the priesthood in such close proximity to the Pope, the Successor of Peter. Indeed, in its over 150 years of service, the College has formed over 5,000 men for priestly service in the United States.

Incidentally, the Bishop whom I served as priest secretary for many years, James Cardinal Hickey, served as Rector of the North American College from 1969 to 1974, and later as Bishop of Cleveland, and eventually as Archbishop of Washington.

The North American College was originally housed on the Via dell'Umiltà, near the Trevi Fountain, in a building that now serves as a house for American priests pursuing graduate studies in Rome. The present building was personally blessed by Pope Pius XII in 1953. There is an inscription over the main entrance to the College

which says: “To this place, looking towards the Vatican Hill, young men come from the distant shores of America to strengthen their Faith and their Love of the Roman Pontiff.”

### **III. Priestly Vocations**

All of which brings us to the intention for which we offer this Mass: today at the beginning of our Pallium pilgrimage, we pray that the Lord will send to the great Archdiocese of Baltimore many new priestly vocations, and we pray that the young men Christ is calling to priestly ministry will hear His voice, and will be given the grace to respond with courage and generosity.

We are literally in the shadow of the dome which rises above the tomb of the Apostle Peter, the first Pope. He was the one whom Jesus asked, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” To which he responded, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And Jesus said “Feed my sheep.” Peter did that, and Jesus extends that call down through the centuries, so that the Gospel can be preached to us, and the sacraments of salvation can be celebrated for us. After all, without priests, there’s no Eucharist, and without the Eucharist, there’s no hope.

In today’s Gospel, we heard Jesus say to Peter – whose earthly remains rest literally steps away from where we are right now – “Put out into deep water, and lower your nets for a catch.” And that’s what we’re here to do. We’re here to ask the Lord very fervently not for a trickle of vocations, but for an abundance – because the faithful of our Archdiocese deserve nothing less.

### **IV. Saint Josemaria Escriva**

Today is also a special day for the Church in the City of Rome, because it is the feast of a modern-day Saint who lived and worked right in this City – Saint Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei.

On the very first night he arrived in Rome from Spain, Saint Josemaria was so moved by love for and loyalty to the Roman Pontiff that he spent the whole night on the rooftop terrace of the building where he was staying, and, facing the Papal apartments, he prayed for hours on end for the person and the intentions of the Pope.

Saint Josemaria died on June 26, 1975, and he was canonized by Blessed John Paul II in October of 2002. He's been called "the saint of the ordinary," because his message is that since we are sons and daughters of God by our Baptism, then everything we do, even the humblest and most routine of tasks, can be filled with love, and offered to God for the salvation of the world.

And of the priesthood, Saint Josemaria said so memorably: "A priest is no more a man or a Christian than any ordinary lay person. That is why it is so important for a priest to be deeply humble. He must understand that these words of Saint Paul also apply to him in a special way: 'What have you that you did not receive?'" He continues, "What [the priest] has received... is God! He has received the power to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Mass (the principal purpose of priestly ordination), to forgive sins, to administer the other sacraments and to preach with authority the Word of God, governing the rest of the faithful in those matters which refer to the Kingdom of Heaven."

## **V. Conclusion**

So as we begin this time together, let us pray for each other, let us pray for the Holy Father, let us pray for our families and friends at home, let us pray for priestly vocations, and, if I might be so bold, I'd ask you to pray for me too!

And in closing, here is a beautiful, simple prayer of Saint Josemaria, which he would say interiorly to the Lord when receiving him in Holy Communion:

"I wish, my Lord, to receive you  
with the purity, humility and devotion  
with which your most holy Mother received you;  
with the spirit and the fervor of the Saints."

May God bless us and keep us in His love!