

# Pope encourages priests to be inspired by Christ

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI encouraged today's priests to be inspired by Christ's sacrifice and love for others as they face their "tremendously heavy" burden of pastoral responsibilities.

The pope made the comments April 5 at a chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, where he led more than 1,000 priests and bishops in a renewal of their ordination promises.

The pope, presiding over the first of two Holy Thursday liturgies, blessed the chrism and the oils used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick.

They were carried to the altar in silver urns by groups of catechumens, youths preparing for confirmation, the sick and deacons about to be ordained in the Diocese of Rome.

In his homily, the pope spoke about the challenges of the priesthood.

"At times we would like to say to Jesus: Lord, your burden is not at all light. On the contrary, it is tremendously heavy in this world," the pope said.

"But looking at the one who brought everything, who personally experienced obedience, weakness, pain and darkness, then these complaints of ours fade away," he said.

In administering the sacraments, the pope said, the priest "no longer represents himself and no longer expresses himself," but speaks and acts for Christ. For that reason, he said, priests must continually configure themselves to Christ, something that is symbolized in the liturgical vestments they put on.

The amice, which traditionally covered the shoulders and head, reminds priests to concentrate on the celebration of the Mass and on the figure of Christ, and not to let their thoughts wander, he said.

The stole and alb evoke the festive clothing given by the father to the tattered and dirty prodigal son in the Gospel parable, he said. They should remind priests how far they are from Christ and “how much filth exists in our lives,” he said.

The pope said the chasuble, the main liturgical garment worn over the rest, symbolizes the yoke of Christ and his burden of suffering. All priests should continue to learn “mildness and humility” from him, he said.

The vestments above all should symbolize love toward God and neighbor, he said.

“A person without love is darkness inside,” he said.

“As we approach the celebration of the Mass, we should ask ourselves if we are wearing this clothing of love. We ask the Lord to drive all hostility from our inmost selves, to remove any sense of self-sufficiency and to dress us with the clothing of love,” he said.

The pope began his homily by citing a story by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, in which a king asked a shepherd how God worked. The shepherd said they first had to exchange clothes.

When the king stood in the shepherd’s worn garments, the shepherd said to him: “This is what God does.” The pope said the story is a useful allegory of how God became man and assumed the role of servant for all people.