



CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

“Are you resolved to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and explaining the Catholic faith?”

(Pontificale Romanum. De Ordinatione Episcopi, presbyterorum et diaconorum,
Editio typical altera, Typis Polyglotis Vaticanis 1990)

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

The “New Evangelisation” calls each of us to the ever renewed task of the apostolate and proclamation. The Lord’s mandate to the Apostles is, in this sense, explicit and incomparable: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk. 16: 15-16a). The task that is assumed during priestly ordination is precisely that of “carrying out the ministry of the Word”, that is, to spend one’s whole existence in announcing Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, crucified and Risen, the unique and authentic response to the needs of the human heart. Responsibility for the “service of the Word” cannot simply be for some priests who are particularly sensitive to this aspect of the Sacred Ministry. Rather, it is a characteristic that belongs indispensably to the Presbyteral Ministry, constituting an essential part of that *munus docendi* received from the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Order.

The rite of ordination foresees that the task of fulfilling this service to be “worthy” and “wise”. The dignity in question belongs to the object of the proclamation, namely Jesus Christ the Saviour. A Priest does not proclaim himself or his own ideas, or his personal and subjective interpretations of the one Eternal Word. We are called to acknowledge the supreme dignity of Him of whom we are the bearers, and as a consequence to fulfil such a service in a worthy manner. Such an awareness cannot but lead us to undertake a constant deepening of our appreciation of the Sacred Scriptures, “the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit” (*Dei Verbum* 9); an appreciation which, while certainly exegetical and theological, is spiritual above all. The true knowledge of the Scriptures is that of the heart, which is born of daily contact with it, from *Lectio Divina* practiced in the footsteps of the great tradition

of the Fathers, from deep meditation which gradually but effectively conforms the soul to the Gospel, transforming each priest into a “living Gospel”. We know well that “the Gospel is not just a word: Christ himself is the Gospel” (Benedict XVI, *Homily* 12/09/09), and we are called to conform ourselves to Him, even in exercising the ministry of preaching.

Along with the dignity of such a service, the sacred Liturgy also indicates “wisdom” as one of its characteristics. This presupposes the prudence and the capacity of tending to look at reality according to the totality of its elements, not making any human point of view an absolute, but referring everything to the One Absolute who is God. Wise preaching takes account of the concrete needs of those whom one addresses, never imposing arbitrary and insufficient interpretations, but always favouring the one thing necessary: a real encounter with God for the brothers and sisters entrusted to our care. Wisdom is able to distinguish between circumstances, times and fashions; it is humble and does not raise the preacher above Him who must be preached, neither does it vaunt him above the Church, which, for two thousand years, has kept the Gospel living. Finally, fulfilling the “ministry of the Word” wisely means being attentively conscious of the work of God in every proclamation; it is He who prepares hearts; it is He who encounters people; it is He who makes the buds of conversion flower, and makes the fruit of Charity ripen. The only “relativism” allowed is towards oneself: as preachers we must be completely “in relation to God”!

IN this way we will discover the effectiveness and the beauty of the Ministry entrusted to us by announcing the Word; we will point towards that intimate companionship of the Lord, who loves him who gives with joy and who never leaves his servant alone; we will contemplate with emotion the fruits which he shall allow; and we will make known also his closeness in the moment of the Cross.

✠Mauro Piacenza
Titular Archbishop of Vittoriana
Secretary