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HOLY MASS WITH PRIESTLY ORDINATIONS

HOMILY OF POPE LEO XIV

St Peter's Basilica
4th Sunday of Easter, 26 April 2026
[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

My greetings go in particular to those who were just presented for ordination to the priesthood, your families, the priests of Rome, many of whom were ordained on this fourth Sunday of Easter, and to all present.

This Sunday is full of life! Although death surrounds us, Jesus' promise is already coming true: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn 10:10*). We see great generosity and enthusiasm in the willingness of these young men whom the Church calls today to be ordained as priests. As a numerous and diverse community gathered around the one Master, we feel a presence that renews us. It is the Holy Spirit, who unites people and vocations in freedom, so that no one lives for themselves any longer. Every Sunday calls us out of the "tomb" of isolation and seclusion, so that we can meet in the garden of communion where the Risen One is our guardian.

The vocation of these our brothers invites us to reflect upon the priest's service, which is a ministry of communion. "Life in abundance," in fact, comes to us in a deeply personal encounter with the person of the Son, but it immediately opens our eyes to our brothers and sisters who are already experiencing, or who are still seeking, the "power to become children of God" (*Jn* 1:12). This is one secret for the life of the priest. Dear ordinands, the deeper your bond with Christ, the more radical your belonging to all of humanity. There is no opposition, nor competition, between heaven and earth; in Jesus they are united forever. This living and dynamic mystery binds the heart to an indissoluble love: it binds and fills it. Certainly, like the love of spouses, the love that inspires celibacy for the Kingdom of God must also be guarded and constantly renewed, for every true affection matures and becomes fruitful over time. You are called to a specific, delicate and difficult way of loving and, even more so, of allowing yourselves to be loved in freedom. This will make you not only good priests but also honest, helpful citizens, builders of peace and social friendship.

In this regard, it is striking that in the Gospel that was proclaimed (*Jn* 10:1–10), Jesus refers to aggressive figures and actions: strangers, thieves, and robbers who disregard boundaries and intrude between him and those he loves. They come, Jesus says, "only to steal and kill and destroy" (v. 10). Their voices are different from his own, and are unrecognizable (cf. v. 5). The Lord's words are full of realism. He knows the cruelty of the world, where he walks with us. With his words, he evokes not only forms of physical aggression, but above all of spiritual aggression. This does not, however, deter him from giving up his life. Denunciation does not become renunciation; danger does not lead to flight. This is another secret for the life of the priest: we must not be frightened by reality. It is the Lord of life who calls us. May the ministry entrusted to you, dear brothers, convey the peace of those who know that they are safe, even amid dangers.

Today the need for security makes people aggressive, causes communities to close in on themselves and leads people to seek out enemies and scapegoats. Fear is often present around us and perhaps within us. May your security not lie in the role you hold, but in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as well as in your participation, along with your people, in the story of salvation. This salvation is already at work in the many good deeds that are quietly carried out by people of goodwill in the parishes and settings where you will join them as fellow travellers. What you proclaim and celebrate will protect you, even in difficult times.

In the communities where you will be sent, the risen One is already present, and many have already followed him commendably. You will recognize his wounds and distinguish his voice. You will encounter people who will direct you towards him. These communities will also help you to become saints! For your part, help them to walk together, following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, so that they may become places — gardens — of life that rise anew and share themselves with others. People are often lacking a place where they can understand that it is better and beautiful to be together, and that it is possible to get along. Facilitating encounters, helping to bring together those who would otherwise never meet, and conciliating division is one and the same as celebrating the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Coming together always means planting the Church anew.

At one point in today's Gospel, Jesus begins to speak about himself using an important image. He was describing himself as the "shepherd," but those listening seemed not to understand. So he changes the metaphor: "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep" (*Jn 10:7*). In Jerusalem, there was a gate called exactly that, "the gate of the sheep," near the pool of Bethesda. Sheep and lambs entered the temple through it, first being immersed in water, and then being destined for sacrifice. This image immediately reminds us of Baptism.

"I am the gate," Jesus said. The Jubilee showed us that this image continues to speak to the hearts of millions of people. For centuries, doors — often true portals — have invited people to cross the threshold of the Church. In some cases, the baptismal font was built outside, like the ancient Pool of Bethesda, beneath whose porticoes "lay many invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed" (*Jn 5:3*). Dear ordinands, consider yourselves to be part of this suffering humanity, which awaits abundant life. By introducing others to the faith, you will rekindle your own. Together with the baptized faithful, you will cross the threshold of the mystery every day — the threshold bearing the face and name of Jesus. Never hide this holy door. Do not block it; do not be an obstacle to those who wish to enter. "You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering" (*Lk 11:52*): this is Jesus' bitter rebuke to those who have hidden the key to a passage that was meant to be open to all.

Today more than ever, especially when statistics seem to indicate a divide between people and the Church, keep the door open! Let people in, and be prepared to go out. This is another secret for your life: you are a channel, not a filter. Many believe they already know what lies beyond the threshold. They carry memories with them, perhaps from a distant past. Often, there is something within them that is alive and has not died out; this draws them in. Other times, however, there is something else within them that still bleeds and repels them. The Lord knows, and he waits. Be a reflection of his patience and tenderness. You belong to everyone and are for everyone! Let this be the fundamental purpose of your mission: to keep the threshold open and direct others to it, without using too many words.

On the other hand, Jesus insists and clarifies: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (*Jn 10:9*). He does not stifle our freedom. There are communities that suffocate; some groups are easy to enter but are almost impossible to leave. This is not the case of the Lord's Church, nor of the community of his disciples. Whoever is saved, says Jesus, can "come in and go out and find pasture." We all seek shelter, rest and care. The Church's doors are open, but not to cut us off from life: life does not end in a parish, in an association, in a movement, in a group. Whoever is saved can "go out and find pasture."

Dear brothers, go out and discover culture, people and life! Marvel at the things that God makes grow without our having sown them. The people you will serve as priests — lay faithful and families, young and old, children and the sick — inhabit pastures that you must come to know. At times it will seem to you that you lack the necessary maps. But the Good Shepherd has them; listen to his very familiar voice. So many people today feel lost! Many feel they can no longer find their bearings. In this regard, there is no more precious testimony than this: "He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake" (*Ps 23:2-3*). His name is Jesus: "God saves"! You are witnesses to this. "Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (*Ps 23:6*). Dear brothers, sisters, and young people: may it be so!



The **HOLY SEE**

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