

CHOSEN TO BE SENT

**The priestly Ordination of Jaime Paredes,
Basilica of the Sacred Heart, San Salvador
March 1, 1980**

Dear Jaime, beloved priests and very beloved People of God.

In order to understand the deep meaning of this moment it is necessary to remember that it was after a night spent in prayer that Jesus chose the first priests of Christianity.(1) We must also call to mind the time when Jesus was attacked by his enemies and told that he was possessed by a demon, told that he was a trouble maker. He responds by telling them that he was chosen by the Father and sent into the world. Those two words, chosen and sent, are the essence of our priesthood.¹

The act of creation arose from the eternal plan of God. At the same time it was also God's plan to form a priestly people so that women and men who inhabited the world might be able to elevate their minds and hearts in prayer to God and become missionaries who proclaim the presence of God's eternal love. Immediately after Jesus' baptism we see that he called the first individuals who were to be the first priests of Christianity. Here we must also refer to the People of God, also a priestly people, and affirm the fact that through our baptism we form part of this priestly people. God desired to chose some individuals from among the priestly people to guide his Church which would have a sublime mission to fulfill, a cultic and salvific mission.

When speaking about the cultic mission we refer to the act of gathering people together in order to participate in an act of worship, in order to give thanks and recognize God as creator, in order to join together in prayers of supplication and reaffirm the infinite majesty of God. Worship is a necessary act of every creature, every intelligent being who possesses free will. God not only desires worship but also wants these same people who come together in prayer and worship to be missionaries, that is, a people who live the act of redemption. God wants them to save the world that is mired in sin.

This is the priestly mission of the Church. Thus, when Jesus became flesh, the incarnation did not end in the miraculous act that took place in Mary's womb but rather was prolonged throughout history. Every woman and man who believes in Christ is incorporated into Christ through Baptism and thus Christ continues the act of the incarnation, building a people who pay homage to God and bring his salvation to the whole world.

Therefore there arises a need: the need for other men to continue the priestly line of the People of God. Thus ministerial priesthood came into existence. Men are taken from among other men to be concerned about the things of God, that is, men concerned about sharing a cultic and salvific mission with people, men who continue the live like Christ who became human so that his incarnation might continue to penetrate people and families and diverse sectors, penetrate those areas where humanity needs and understands the need of being saved and worshipping God.

In this way the ministerial priesthood comes into existence. Therefore, as we heard in the first reading, we need men who have been led by God from the time of conception in their mother's womb. Saint Paul said that we are suited for this ministry because we came into existence according to God's plan and as such we are destined to dedicate our lives to worship, to the proclamation of the Word of God and to extending the invitation of salvation to all people. Thus as

priests we nourish people and this is our reason for being, the reason for our sacrifice. But it is not we who nourish people but rather we are God's instruments. Therefore we ought to use great care in the exercise of our priestly ministry because our ministry is a gift of God that is meant to be shared with people. The mission that Jesus conferred upon his Church was done in order to make the Church pleasing to himself and was not done solely to preserve her as pure and spotless. The Church has a mission that is to be carried out for others and with others. You are a priest of the Church for the same reason as Jesus. You are anointed; you are chosen; you are sent forth.

Priesthood consists of two things: anointing and sending forth. We are doing this today! In a few moments we, bishops and priests, your brothers in this new family, will have the honor and pleasure of placing our hands upon your head and depositing upon you a treasure, an inheritance that places a great responsibility upon you. I will have the pleasure of using chrism, a sign of the anointing that made Jesus holy, the holiest. I am going to anoint your hands with this holy oil that will make you a priest forever.

I am going to call you from among others. But it is not I who do this, rather I am an instrument of the all-powerful God who in eternity anointed Christ and who today anoints you, chooses you, consecrates you and calls you from the world to be definitively consecrated. You are not called to undertake the mission for some specific period of time but rather you are called to be engaged in this mission forever. This consecration affects your whole being. Like Christ you are an anointed man. You are anointed and filled with the Spirit of God. You no longer belong to yourself or your family and, in a certain sense, you do not belong to humankind because God has chosen you and anoints you and makes you his own. You are able to bless with the blessing of God and proclaim the Word of God. You enter into an intimate relationship with God because you are consecrated. Like Jesus, you can say that God has chosen you, God has anointed you, God has made you holy. But all of this has happened so that you might now be sent forth.

The consecration, that in a certain manner separates you from all that which is human, enables you to deepen yourself in that which is human so that from this perspective you might go into the world where you are to carry out your cultic and salvific mission. As you celebrate Mass and offer the bread and wine that is the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, you bring together and offer the sufferings and the hopes and the pains of all people, you bring together the people's longings for justice, the hopes and anxieties of so many people who both suffer and rejoice. You must proclaim that all these realities are not lost here on earth but are raised up in worship of God. Thanks to your word the Body and Blood of the Lord, the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary, is made present and the sorrows and hopes of humanity are given a divine meaning.

Besides celebrating Mass you will pray the Divine Office. You will pray. Prayer is the essence of our priestly life. You will be like Jesus who spent the night in prayer, who in this intimacy with the Father discovers the forgiveness that humanity needed. Thus in prayer we find the grace that we need to confront our limitations. We also raise up in prayers of thanksgiving so many holy men and women among our people and we forgive the sins of people. This will be your mission as you worship God.

This mission of the priest is not only one of worship just as the immolation of Jesus was not simply one of worship....²

The people were scattered as a result of sin but then saved from materialism and idolatry in order to become worshippers of the one God. They were saved from the injustices that wrapped them in sadness and became a people who no longer experienced fear, even though they did not

understand all of this when Moses brought them out of Egypt. The people longed for the food they had eaten in Egypt and grumbled against Moses: *would that we had died at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt* (2). When we do not understand the liberating meaning of salvation we become like those people who did not want to undertake the journey toward the Promised Land, we become like those who did not want to free themselves from the slavery that they had grown accustomed to.

Free yourselves from sin! The priest cannot tolerate sin. Wherever he finds sin he must denounce it and put it to rout. Yet he also knows that he may be put to death or assassinated by those who have undertaken the task of enthroning sin. The priest cannot be an accomplice of enthroning sin. Therefore the mission of the priest is salvific but will cause conflict. Last Sunday in the gospel Jesus told us: *Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.* (3) *Therefore, blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and insult you and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold your reward will be great in heaven* (4).

The authenticity of the true prophet, the true priest and the true mission of the Church is revealed in the following: that one preaches with autonomy the Word of the Lord and denounces all sin and injustice. Your mission has to be salvific and one cannot save unless one denounces sin. One must also be willing to be denounced for one's own sins. The prophet must also be willing to be reproached for his bad conduct, for his unworthy behavior. For this reason we must make every effort to be the primary followers of Christ who asks us to be intransigent and radical in following the gospel. *No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God* (5). *Let the dead bury the dead.* (6) *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me* (7). These are powerful words and appear to be almost inhuman. Nevertheless it must be understood that those who leave everything for the Lord's sake will obtain the Kingdom of God.(8) Those who fear losing their life and therefore are not willing to become involved in the conflicts of the gospel (9): those individuals will lose their lives. This radicalness in which we become faithful to the Lord's mission is most important.

Beloved Jaime, I have drawn near to your soul but I do not know the depth of your spirituality or priesthood. I am sure, however, that this celebration and the great heritage of priestly consecration and your mission as priest comes alive in you and is faithfully accepted. There is a certain path that Jesus chose and it is the path that must be chosen and followed by all who want to give a good accounting of their lives on the final day. Here I refer to what theology calls *kenosis*, that is, self-emptying and humbling oneself. In this way we imitate Christ, who being God, became poor in order to save those who are poor (10) and from the perspective of the poor saves humanity. There is no other path to salvation. There is no demagogy in Jesus' words when he proclaims: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor* (11). Jesus did not speak these words in an exclusive manner but rather, in an evangelical way, called people from every social class to embrace as their own the problems of those who are poor. We are called to imitate Christ, who being God and therefore deserving like no one else to be honored on earth, desired to make himself unworthy of such honors and is born as the poorest of men, among those who are poor so that he himself might be poor. He was sentenced to an ignominious death and accepted suffering. This is the *kenosis* that we speak about and for this reason *God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth* (12). For me, our true glory, our true prestige is not found in our success here on earth but rather in the fact that God finds us pleasing to him and that Christ sees that we have attempted to follow his light and his life of poverty and humility.

Dear Jaime, I assure you that this will be your priesthood if you cling to the cross, if you cling to poverty and the Lord's *kenosis*. In this way you will obtain the greatest prestige because there is no other form of priesthood that is more pleasing, more effective or more useful to humanity. There is no priest who is more pleasing to God than the one who fulfills the mission for which he was consecrated, the one who, from his identity that flows from his consecration, is light and salt and leaven to all human situations, including the difficult efforts that our people undertake in order to obtain their liberation. In this way priests will never betray their priestly identity or exchange their priestly mission for some other earthly objective. Therefore the priest, from the perspective of his identity as priest and the integrity of the gospel, cries out on behalf of the justice of the Kingdom of God.

We are going to proceed with this significant act by giving thanks to the Lord. In a special way I want to thank your parents, your family, because there is no doubt that a priest is always the product of the faith and love of a good home situation and that these seeds of faith and love are sown in the family. It is a glory for you and for all those who have known you and who are gathered here. Indeed, we are gathered here as your friends or your new friends, like the seminarians with whom you lived and who have come from Chalatenango. You have shared your life, a holy life, with these young men. All of these people are part of your priestly family and as you become a priest you are not betraying or losing your name but rather you are ennobling your name.

Who today could feel more proud than your parents knowing that their love is now prolonged in your priestly life and in your new family, your brother priests who are going to impose their hands upon you and confer upon you the priestly character? You will find support in the prayers of the people who give meaning to your life as a priest.

I ask you, my beloved sisters and brothers and People of God through Baptism and Confirmation, to accompany the priests in an intimate manner. Do not judge them falsely. As they lead the journey of the People of God along the path of salvation, of worship, let us follow them with the faithfulness of the gospel and with such an openness that if at some time we do not fulfill our obligations may the priests help us and do so in charity and not with harshness. Here we are dealing with the eternal destiny of the Church and so we are all concerned about our priests always being priests. May their words always be authentic so that they might teach us the ways of the Lord and not deceive us like the false teachers whom Saint Paul denounced because in seeking flattery they did not commit themselves to confronting the world's difficulties. Let us conclude then and allow me to share with you my wish and desire that I place before all of you, beloved priests, women religious and faithful: let us build the Church that is like the Church that the Lord established and that was the reason for Christ's incarnation. May the incarnation continue to be prolonged in us, the People of God. Therefore may we lift up our hearts in prayer and worship and may we be instruments that bring salvation to the world ... a gift that the world so urgently needs.

¹ We have put this title to the homily because Mons. Romero did not choose a title or give three points, as he normally did.

² The tape recording the sermon was defective and contained several interruptions, as here.