

Homily for Jubilarians' Mass

Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady – 8 September 2011

My dear Brothers and Sisters

Today we have a double celebration. We honour our Blessed Lady with a feast which marks her birth, and we honour those, who as priests of this Archdiocese, have served the Church over many years. Today they mark the anniversaries of their ordination. How can we connect these two commemorations?

We can note that in both cases there has been a choice made – of Mary that she might bring to birth the word made flesh. Of our Jubilarians, that as priests they might, through word and sacrament, make Christ present:

- that he might be in enfleshed again,
- that his mystical body may grow,
- that in pronouncing the words “this is my body” those who act in His name may themselves take on his image.

And so we read in the Epistle of today's Mass:

“God co-operates with all those who love Him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose. They are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of His Son.”

Mary herself is hailed as an image - an image of the Church. For in the words of the Second Vatican Council, “Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation and in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith... She summons the faithful to her son... and to love for the Father.”

Elsewhere, the Council, in addressing Mary's advocacy, makes a comparison with that of the priesthood:

“No creature could ever be classed with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer (as Mediator). But, just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways, both by sacred ministers and by the faithful, and as the goodness of God is in reality communicated diversely to his creatures, so

also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise among creatures to a manifold co-operation which is but a sharing in this unique source."

And so we recognise between Our Lady, the Mother of God, and those who as brothers of Christ and sharers of his priesthood become her sons, a threefold connection.

Mary is *especially chosen*, and so are those called to the priesthood. As the preface of the Mass of Chrism beautifully expresses it: "Christ gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people he has made his own. From these, with a brother's love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry. He appoints them to renew in His name the sacrifice of our redemption."

Mary and her chosen sons share also *a common mission* albeit different in its manner of achievement – for both bring Christ to birth – Mary in His bodily enfleshment and priests in His sacramental presence.

Mary stood at the foot of the cross and partook of the Lord's sufferings while her priestly sons stand at the altar commissioned – as expressed in the rite of ordination in this way: "Your ministry will perfect the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful by uniting it to Christ's sacrifice, the sacrifice which is offered sacramentally through your hands. Know what you are doing and imitate the mystery you celebrate."

Our Lady and our priests therefore, share intimately in our Lord's *redemptive action* on behalf of all mankind – as the Letter to the Hebrews says:

"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death and he was heard for his godly fear. Although son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and, being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

At both cross and altar that obedience is the obedience of faith, of which Mary is the model.

The decree of the Council on the ministry and life of priests declares: "(Priests) can always find a wondrous model in the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Led by the Holy Spirit, she devoted herself entirely to the mystery of man's redemption. With the devotion and veneration of sons, priests should lovingly honour this Mother of the supreme and eternal Priest, this Queen of the Apostles and protectress of their ministry." (III 18)

I cannot do better, brother priests, in honouring you today, than encouraging you to take to heart these memorable words. And may the Lord Himself sustain you in your priestly service.