

*His Holiness Leo XIV*

*Audience with the Presbyters Carrying Out Their Ministry*

*in the Diocese of Rome*

12 June 2025

Paul VI hall – Vatican City

I would like to ask for a warm round of applause for all of you who are here today, and for all the priests and deacons of Rome!

Dearest Presbyters and Deacons who carry out your ministry in the Diocese of Rome, dear seminarians, I greet you all with affection and friendship!

I thank His Eminence, the Cardinal Vicar, for his words of greeting and for the introduction he gave, sharing something of your presence in this city.

I wished to meet you in order to get to know you personally and to begin walking this journey with you. I thank you for your lives offered in service of the Kingdom, for your daily labours, for the great generosity with which you exercise your ministry, and for all that you live in silence—often accompanied by suffering or misunderstanding. You carry out different tasks, but each of you is precious in God's eyes and in the fulfilment of His plan.

The Diocese of Rome presides in charity and communion, and it can carry out this mission thanks to each one of you, bound by grace to the Bishop and in fruitful co-responsibility with the entire People of God. Ours is truly a unique diocese, as many priests come here from various parts of the world, especially for study purposes; this means that pastoral life – I'm thinking particularly of the parishes – is marked by this universality and by the mutual welcome it entails.

And it is precisely from this universal perspective offered by Rome that I would like to share a few reflections with you.

The first point, which is particularly close to my heart, is that of unity and communion. In the so-called “priestly” prayer, as we know, Jesus asked the Father that His own may be one (cf. Jn 17:20–23). The Lord knows well that only if we are united to Him and united among ourselves can we bear fruit and offer the world a credible witness. Presbyteral communion here in Rome is fostered by the ancient tradition of living together, whether in presbyteries, colleges, or other residences. The priest is called to be a man of communion, because he himself lives it and constantly nourishes it. We are aware that this communion today is hindered by a cultural climate that encourages isolation or self-referential attitudes. None

of us is immune to these dangers that threaten the strength of our spiritual life and the vigour of our ministry.

But we must be vigilant, because beyond the cultural context, communion and fraternity among us also encounter what we might call “internal” obstacles. These concern the ecclesial life of the Diocese, interpersonal relationships, and also what dwells in the heart – especially that sense of weariness that sets in when we have experienced particular trials, or when we have felt misunderstood and unheard, or for other reasons. I wish to support you, to walk with you, so that each of you may recover peace and joy in your ministry. But precisely for this, I ask you for a renewed commitment to priestly fraternity, rooted in a solid spiritual life, in encounter with the Lord and in listening to His Word. Nourished by this sap, we can cultivate relationships of friendship, outdoing one another in showing honour (cf. Rom 12:10); we come to recognise our need for one another, to grow and to foster our shared ecclesial mission.

Communion must also be translated into active involvement in the Diocese; with diverse charisms, different paths of formation and services, but united in the effort to support her. I ask everyone to pay close attention to the pastoral journey of this Church, which is local but, because of the one who presides over it, also universal. Walking together is always a guarantee of fidelity to the Gospel; together, and in harmony, striving to enrich the Church with one’s own charism but always with the heartfelt desire to be one body, of which Christ is the Head.

The second point I wish to entrust to you is that of exemplariness. On the occasion of the priestly ordinations this past 31st May, in my homily I recalled the importance of a transparent life, drawing from the words of St Paul, who said to the elders of Ephesus: “You know how I lived” (Acts 20:18). I ask you this with the heart of a father and pastor: let us all strive to be credible and exemplary priests! We are aware of our human limitations, and the Lord knows us through and through; but we have received an extraordinary grace, we have been entrusted with a precious treasure of which we are ministers, servants. And faithfulness is required of a servant. None of us is immune to the allurements of the world, and the city, with its countless attractions, might lead us away from the desire for holiness, drawing us into a downward levelling where we lose the deep values of being presbyters. Let yourselves be drawn once more by the call of the Master, to feel and live again the love of the first hour, that love which led you to make bold decisions and courageous renunciations. If together we try to be exemplary in a life of humility, then we will be able to express the renewing power of the Gospel for every man and woman.

The final point I want to leave with you is that of looking at the challenges of our time through a prophetic lens. We are troubled and saddened by all that is happening in the world each day: we are wounded by the violence that brings death; we are called to respond to inequality, poverty, so many forms of social exclusion, and the widespread suffering that increasingly takes the form of a deep malaise that spares no one. And these realities are not happening far away, but are very much present in our own city of Rome, marked by many forms of poverty and serious issues such as the housing crisis. A city in which, as Pope Francis noted, alongside the “great beauty” and the fascination of art, there must also be “simple decency and basic functionality in the places and situations of ordinary, everyday life. For a city that is more liveable for its citizens is also more welcoming for everyone” (Homily at Vespers with Te Deum, 31 December 2023).

The Lord has called us to be here in this time, full of challenges that at times seem greater than our strength. We are called to embrace these challenges, to interpret them in the light of the Gospel, to live them as opportunities for witness. Let us not run away from them! Let our pastoral commitment, as well as our study, become for all of us a school where we learn to build the Kingdom of God in the present moment of a complex and demanding history. In recent times we have had the example of saintly priests who were able to combine a passion for history with the proclamation of the Gospel, such as Don Primo Mazzolari and Don Lorenzo Milani, prophets of peace and justice. And here in Rome we had Don Luigi Di Liegro, who, faced with great poverty, gave his life to seek out paths of justice and human promotion. Let us draw strength from these examples to continue sowing seeds of holiness in our city.

Dearest brothers, I assure you of my closeness, my affection, and my willingness to walk with you. Let us entrust our priestly life to the Lord and ask Him to help us grow in unity, exemplariness, and prophetic engagement, in order to serve our time. Let us be accompanied by the heartfelt appeal of Saint Augustine, who said:

“Love this Church, remain in this Church, be this Church. Love the Good Shepherd, the most beautiful Spouse, who deceives no one and wants no one to perish. Pray also for the stray sheep: that they too may come, that they too may recognise, that they too may love, so that there may be one fold and one shepherd” (Sermon 138, 10).

Thank you!