



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Message to Priests Celebrating their Jubilees of Priesthood

Archbishop Vincent Nichols

Archbishop Vincent Nichols has sent a letter to 45 priests celebrating their Ruby, Golden or Diamond Jubilee of ordination at the English College in Rome, praising their “remarkable service”.

My dear brother priests,

As you gather at Palazzola to celebrate the Ruby, Golden and Diamond Jubilees of your priesthood, I assure you of the congratulations and prayers of thanksgiving of the Bishops of England and Wales for the years of dedicated ministry that each of you has given in the service of Christ and his Church. While you treasure and share your personal memories and experiences, it is remarkable to think that your combined years of service in the priesthood comes to a grand total of 2,120 years!

In 2009 Pope Benedict XVI announced a special year of prayer for priests. He hoped this would “support that struggle of every priest ‘toward spiritual perfection, on which the effectiveness of his ministry primarily depends’.” I hope your time together can bear similar fruit, for the Holy Father went on to say that the year was “to help priests first of all – and with them all of God’s people – to rediscover and reinvigorate their awareness of the extraordinary and indispensable gift of grace that the ordained ministry is, for he who receives it, for the whole Church, and for the world, which would be lost without the real presence of Christ.”

I hope that being together in the peace and beauty of Palazzola will provide you with an opportunity to share your joy and gratitude for that “extraordinary and indispensable gift of grace”. You will, no doubt, look back over those many years of your priesthood with a wide variety of thoughts and feelings, conscious of your own struggle and weakness at times but predominantly, I trust, with happiness and thanksgiving. In our lives as priests, we come to realize increasingly that our priesthood is a gift which has been given, first and foremost, not for us but for others. Yet, that priesthood, which is always Christ’s, is a sacramental gift for us too. It renews our faith, our hope and our love in our service of others. At its heart is our friendship with a person, our Lord, our friend and our brother, Jesus Christ. I pray that this friendship is refreshed and deepened as you celebrate this great gift.

Priestly life at its best is made up of continual offers of love: from God to us; from so many people to us; on the part, too, for all we receive. We pray that these gifts of love may be accepted and deepened in each and every one of us throughout our years of ministry. Then we will understand more deeply those words which are the supreme example of an offer of love: “This is my body broken for you; this is my blood poured out for you”. You have made those words your own in your faithful service of Christ and his Church.

I hope and pray that the celebration of your Jubilees at Palazzola will be an occasion for a renewal of joy in, and gratitude for, your priesthood. May it strengthen the bonds between you, renew in you all the joy of priestly ministry and see you return home ready to add substantially to that grand total of 2,120 years of service.

Ad multos annos, vivant!

Most Reverend Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster