

THE CEREMONY OF ORDINATION

In connection with the recent ordinations in St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, the Rev. M. D. Forrest, M.S.H., contributed this deeply interesting article to the *Freeman's Journal*:—

The ceremony of ordination to the priesthood is one of the most solemn, most imposing, and most beautiful ceremonies of the Catholic Church. The deacons, wearing the insignia of their sacred order and carrying upon their arm the priestly chasuble, enter the sanctuary, where the Bishop commences the Holy Sacrifice. Before the Gospel is read, the Bishop turns round, and, having seated himself on the faldstool and received his mitre, reads a beautiful exhortation to those whose souls are so soon to be sealed eternally by the character of Christ's priesthood. How the words of that exhortation thrill the ardent souls of the aspirants! How the very remembrance of those words ever calls up in the heart even of the aged priest the emotions which flood his soul on the morning of his ordination! Space allows me to give only some sentences of this exhortation of Holy Church:—

"My dear children, you are about to be consecrated unto the office of the priesthood: strive to receive it worthily, and, having received it, to discharge it in a praiseworthy manner. For the priest must offer sacrifice, bless, preach, and baptise. We must ascend to so exalted a degree with great fear, and take care that heavenly wisdom, a blameless life, and a long observance of God's justice recommend those who are chosen for it. Keep in your lives the integrity of purity and holiness. Recognise what you do, imitate what you perform: so that, celebrating the mystery of the death of the Lord, you may take care to mortify your members from sin and concupiscence. Let your teaching be the spiritual medicine of the people of God: let the odor of your life be the delight of the Church of God: so that by your preaching and example you may edify the House—that is, the family—of God."

The candidates then fall prostrate, and the Bishop, with the clergy, recites the Litany of the Saints. As soon as the Litany is concluded, the deacons arise and kneel before the Bishop, who lays his two hands upon the head of each, and then, having stretched out his right hand over the kneeling candidates, and recited a short invitational and an introductory prayer, he reads the most solemn and important prayer of the ordination ceremony, the consecrating Preface, which contains the sacramental form of the priesthood:—"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty Father, the dignity of the priesthood to these, Thy servants: renew within them the spirit of holiness, so that they may hold the office of second merit (i.e., the priesthood) received from Thee, O God." Thus the essence of the Sacrament of Holy Orders consists in the imposition or laying on of the hands of the Bishop, and in the consecrating prayer which follows.

The Stole and Chasuble.

The Bishop now bestows on each the insignia of the priestly office—the stole and the chasuble—and, having intoned the "Veni Creator Spiritus," anoints with holy oil the hands that are to hold the Spotless Lamb of God, administer the Sacraments, and bless the people. He next presents the candidates with a chalice containing the wine of the Sacrifice, and a paten containing the bread of the altar; and, while doing so, pronounces the words: "Receive power to offer sacrifice to God, and to celebrate Mass both for the living and the dead, in the name of the Lord." And now the newly-ordained priests kneel around the Bishop, and all offer the Adorable Sacrifice together, pronouncing aloud every portion of the Eucharistic ceremony, even the words of Consecration. After the Communion, once more the priests approach the Bishop, who again places his hands on the head of each, while saying, "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins thou shalt forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins thou shalt retain, they are retained." The voice of the consecrating Bishop is soon hushed, and the young priests

kneel in silence within the sanctuary, their hearts reflecting that wondrous joy and gratitude which filled the immaculate heart of Mary as she knelt within her humble home at Nazareth after her exaltation to the sublimest dignity that Omnipotence can confer upon a finite person—the Divine Motherhood. Oh, the mysterious difference between their souls at the present moment and but a few hours before! They are now priests for ever, for the character of the priesthood is ineffable; yea, even the glory of eternity cannot eclipse the effulgence of the character whereby their souls are marked—the character which clothes them, as far as frail human nature can be clothed, with the very powers and prerogatives of the God-Man.

Kneeling There Before the Altar.

And, while kneeling there before the altar, tremulous yet exultant; feeling the heavenly weight and yet the supernatural lightness of their indescribable office; lost in grateful wonderment and absorbed in joyful love; diffident of their own strength, yet filled with unbounded confidence in the words of a loving Master, "I know whom I have chosen"; scarcely realising that they have now attained the goal of their long-cherished aspirations—that goal which once loomed so dimly before them in the far-off future, when first they heard, deep down in their youthful hearts, the first whisperings of divine grace inviting them into the sanctuary—and learning to exercise their priestly powers—while experiencing all these emotions, which are more easily imagined than described, they each seem to express in mind and heart the simple thoughts embodied in the beautiful lines—

"The childlike faith, the wistful awe,
That used my breast to thrill
Whene'er the vested priest I saw;
The love and trust that fill
And ever filled the Catholic heart
For God's anointed priest:
Must I to my own self feel thus?
I am a priest!
O God, Thy last and least."

The Meaning of the Priesthood.

In order to understand the meaning of the priesthood and the wondrous influence it exercises upon mankind, we must consider three scenes in our Lord's life—the Last Supper, the first apparition of our risen Redeemer to the Apostles, and the final commission given to them on the Mount of Olives. In the first of these touching mysteries we behold Jesus seated at the table with His chosen ministers for the last time during His mortal life: we see Him taking into His hands bread and wine, and, by His own almighty power, changing those inanimate substances into His life-giving flesh and blood by the words of consecration, "This is My Body, this is My Blood"; and, oh, wonder of wonders! we hear Him bequeathing to them and their successors that same divine power of consecration, thus ordaining them His first priests by the simple words, "Do this in remembrance of Me." In the second scene we see our glorified Redeemer standing in the midst of the Apostles, breathing on them and bestowing on them the power—proper to God alone—of forgiving sin. "Peace be to you: as the Father hath sent me, I also send you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." In the last mystery we contemplate our Lord standing triumphantly on the heights of Olivet, authorising His Apostles to go forth and teach mankind all the doctrines He had unfolded to them, and to incorporate all believers into His mystical body, the Church, by the Sacrament of Baptism: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, behold, I am with you all days, even till the end of the world."

Thus the Christian priesthood means a perennial power bequeathed to the Church, and flowing directly from the Heart of God Incarnate—a divine power of