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Good afternoon and greetings to all who are here. It is a joy to spend some days once again in this collegial gathering of Bishops, and to be present here at the Seminary. A special word of congratulations to Didier Buwani of the Diocese of Lexington, who will be instituted into the ministry of Acolyte at this Mass. To each and to all: please know of the Holy Father’s spiritual communion with you.

Jesus said: “I am the bread of life.”¹ All of the readings for this Mass point to the Eucharist. Why? Because the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.”² Therefore, all of the ministries in the Church, including the ministry of acolyte, are ordered to the Eucharist. It is important, therefore, for everyone who ministers within the Church to have an appreciation of the Eucharist in all its dimensions. We serve, not a “thing”, but the living person of Christ who is with us in the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist is sacred because of Christ. What’s important is that the sacrament makes present the risen and living Christ. The Eucharist is an encounter with the Lord. The reason we eat and drink of his Body and Blood, mysteriously present in the forms of bread and wine, is so that the life of Christ and our lives can become more deeply united. Then, when we go forth on mission, we can truly say that we are bringing the Lord to people.

The Eucharistic celebration is not a static thing; it is a dynamic encounter with Christ together with other members of his faithful. Because of this, the Eucharistic celebration is a moment of true *discernment*. We shouldn’t forget this! It is always the same Lord whom we meet in the Eucharistic celebration, but each meeting is a new encounter with him. Each time we come together for the Eucharist, we need to listen to what his Word is saying to us, and to look for where his presence is leading us. Where is he directing our gaze? How can we see his presence in the other members of his body with whom we share this Eucharist? To what peripheries does he want us to go, in order to insert his presence in the world?

¹ John 6:35.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324; *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

To be an acolyte is to serve Christ, beginning from the mystery of the Eucharist. This means both worshipping the Lord, and discerning his call to go forward on mission. When Pope Paul VI changed the minor orders and made them instituted ministries, he required that those to be admitted to these ministries possess “the steadfast will to faithfully serve God and the Christian people”.³ When Pope Francis opened the ministries of lector and acolyte to women back in 2021, he did so because he wanted it to “appear more evidently — also for those who are oriented toward the ordained ministry — that the ministries of Lector and Acolyte are rooted in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.” He explained:

“As such, on the path that leads to diaconal and priestly ordination, those who are instituted as Lectors and Acolytes will better understand they are participants in a ministry shared with other baptized, men and women. Such that the priesthood proper to each of the faithful and the priesthood of ordained ministers may be seen even more clearly interrelated, for the edification of the Church and for the witness to the Gospel.”⁴

In order to have the right attitude regarding our vocation, it is important to remember that when we become ordained priests, we always remain members of the baptized. Our first configuration to Christ was through our Baptism. Baptism is the sacrament that made us, and still makes us, members of his Body. Our Baptism is what gave us, and still gives to our lives, a new and eternal meaning because we are members of God’s family. Baptism is what made us share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, so that we could “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through [him]”.⁵

For a priest, remembering that he is one of the baptized can help him avoid the temptation of clericalism. After all, he is ordained in order to serve the faithful and to be for them a bridge to union with God. As a member of the baptized, he also needs to find that bridge to God for his own sake. And of course, for him as much as for the rest of the faithful, that bridge is Christ. Christ is the one true priest. Both the baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood come from him. We who are

³ Pope St. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972.

⁴ Pope Francis, Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Regarding Access of Women to the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte, 10 January 2021; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

⁵ *1 Peter* 2:5.

ordained ministers will always be united with the lay faithful because we are one in Christ.

In reflecting on the burden of being a bishop, St. Augustine said: “It terrifies me to think that I could take more pleasure in the honor attached to my office, which is where its danger lies, than in your salvation, which ought to be its fruit.” But Augustine found comfort when he recalled the grace that he shared in common with the lay faithful. He said to his people:

“When I remember by whose blood I have been redeemed, this thought brings me peace [...]. And I am consoled, as I carry out the arduous duties of my own particular office, by the blessings which we all have in common. By finding my chief joy therefore in the redemption, which I share with you, and not in my office, which has placed me over you, I shall the more truly be your servant [...].”⁶

For you, Didier, and for all the seminarians who have received the ministry of acolyte, this institution ceremony is an occasion of hope and joyful expectation. God is leading you on a journey of preparation for Holy Orders, and this is another step. But regardless of what the future holds, receiving the ministry of acolyte is already a confirmation of something that God has done in your life. He has made you a remember of his redeemed family in the waters of Baptism. By Confirmation, he has sealed in you his divine gifts. In calling you to serve God’s people, your brothers and sisters in Christ, he has granted you the charisms needed for that service. And in doing so, he has conformed you even more to his Son.

As we continue this Mass, let us all give thanks for the many ways in which God invites us – both the baptized and the ordained – to a participation in the Body and Blood of Christ.⁷

⁶ St. Augustine, Sermon 340, 1; Office of Readings for the Memorial of St. Januarius (September 19).

⁷ Cf. *1 Corinthians* 10:16-17.