Introduction: A Sign of Faith That Transcends Life

In the richness of Catholic tradition, there are profound symbols that speak to us of the mystery of the priestly vocation and the crucial role of the family, especially the mother, in offering a son to God. One such symbol, full of beauty and significance, is the **manutergium**, a simple yet deeply spiritual cloth used in the traditional ordination rite (**Vetus Ordo**).

This ancient tradition reminds us that the priesthood is not just a personal calling but a mission that transforms an entire family. The mother, who has given her son to God, receives a tangible testimony of that offering—a sacred cloth that will accompany her into eternity.

Origin and History of the Manutergium

The word **manutergium** comes from the Latin *manu* (hand) and *tergium* (towel), literally meaning "hand towel." Its use in liturgy dates back centuries as part of the priestly ordination rite in the traditional form of the Mass (**Vetus Ordo**).

During the ordination ceremony, after the bishop lays hands on the new priest and anoints his hands with the sacred chrism, a white cloth is wrapped around his consecrated hands. This is the **manutergium**, which absorbs the holy oil and symbolizes the consecration of the priest's hands for divine service.

However, the meaning of the manutergium goes beyond this sacred moment. Tradition holds that after the ordination, it is the priest's mother who unties the manutergium from her son's hands. She then keeps it as a spiritual treasure until the day of her death when it is placed in her hands as a sign of her motherhood of a priest.

According to pious tradition, when this mother stands before the Lord in her particular judgment, and He asks her:
"I gave you life; what have you given Me in return?"
She may humbly present the manutergium and reply:
"Lord, I gave You my son as a priest."

This moving image expresses the greatness of the priestly vocation and the immense merit of a mother who offers her son for the service of the altar.

The Spiritual Meaning of the Manutergium

The priesthood is a divine gift, but it is also a vocation that requires sacrifice. Christ Himself tells us:

> ***"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"*** *(John 15:16).*

However, behind every priestly vocation, there is a home where faith has been nurtured. The mothers of priests play a special role in this love story between God and the priestly soul. They have prayed, educated in the faith, and, in many cases, been the first inspiration for the vocation.

The manutergium becomes a sign of this silent yet powerful sacrifice. It is a reminder that motherhood is not only biological but also a spiritual calling that accompanies the priest throughout his life.

For a mother, seeing her son become a priest is, in a sense, a new Annunciation, much like that of the Virgin Mary when she received the angel's message:

> ***"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word"*** *(Luke 1:38).*

Is This Tradition Still Kept in the Novus Ordo?

With the liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council, the ordination rite underwent several modifications. In the **Ordinary Form (Novus Ordo)**, the bishop still anoints the new priest's hands with sacred chrism, but the use of the manutergium has disappeared in most places. In some cases, dioceses have preserved the practice of giving newly ordained priests a towel to wipe the chrism, but without the profound symbolism of the traditional rite.

Nevertheless, many Catholic families attached to tradition continue to request the use of the manutergium and uphold the practice of giving it to the priest's mother. In communities where the **Vetus Ordo** is celebrated, the tradition remains alive with all its spiritual richness.

Final Reflection: A Legacy of Love and Holiness

The manutergium is more than just a piece of cloth; it is a testimony of offering, love, and faith. It reminds us that motherhood is a vocation that transcends earthly life and reaches into eternity. A mother who has given her son to the priesthood participates in a special way in the mystery of Redemption.

In a world where the priesthood is often misunderstood or attacked, remembering these traditions helps us appreciate the immense gift that a priest is to the Church. Every mother who gives her son to God is contributing to the growth of His Kingdom, sowing on earth what will one day bloom in heaven.

May this article serve as inspiration for mothers, priests, and all the faithful, so that we may never forget the value of the priesthood and the fundamental role of the family in its formation. Let us pray that many mothers may one day present their manutergium before God and hear from Him the sweetest words:

“Well done, good and faithful servant… enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:23).