

## March 4

# Priestly Ordination of the GOOD FATHER

During the autumn of 1791, he met, in Poitiers, Father Dancel de Bruneval to whom Mgr de Saint Aulaire had confided the diocese before emigrating to Switzerland. He obtained the letters of autorisation which would enable him to receive ordination from the hands of any bishop in communion with Rome.

*"The difficulty was to find one"*, remarks Father Hilarion in his memoirs. At the end of 1791 (or in the early days of 1792), Pierre learned that Mgr. de Bonal, the Bishop of Clermont, was staying in hiding in Paris. ...He arrived there in February 1792. "On his journey", states the writer, "he found all kinds of help, horses for his journey and honest people who paid his expenses, and it did not cost him anything". Underground channels and networks were no doubt already in action.

March 4<sup>th</sup> 1792, the second Sunday of Lent, was for Pierre *"the happiest day of his life"*. And yet, for the thirty or so ordinands standing before Mgr de Bonal, there was no crowd or cathedral, only the smell of old books and the cramped library of the Irish College, a few steps from the Pantheon. The College chapel, which benefited from extraterritoriality, was still open. Every day there were Masses, offices, Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament celebrated by priests who had not taken the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. This intense liturgical activity and the need for discretion explains the ordination in the library. There is no detailed description of the ceremony. Pierre Coudrin was reluctant to confide his secrets. Later he would state that he had *"become a priest with the intention of suffering everything, of sacrificing myself for God and if necessary of dying in his service"*.

This is enough to enable us to imagine the attitude with which he followed the retreat preached in the following days by a disciple of Father de Clorivière, Father François-Georges Cormaux.

Shortly afterwards, the new priest returned to Coussay-les-Bois with this simple certificate in his pocket: *"I certify that M. Pierre Coudrin, of the diocese of Poitiers, is a priest. De Floirac, Vicar General"* (of Paris).

His return, and especially the daily celebration of the Mass, puzzled people. When and where was he ordained priest, and by whom? The parish priest knew about his ordination certificate, and that was enough. On April 8<sup>th</sup> 1792, Easter Sunday, the parish priest invited him to celebrate the High Mass. While they were preparing in the sacristy, Louis Doury, the mayor, arrived with a notice to be read at the end of the celebration. After giving the final blessing, Pierre read the communication from the public prosecutor of Châtellerault, summoning the citizens to elect a new priest, on the following Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, in conformity with the law. Pierre emphasized this reading with a final comment, *"Neither I nor my family will take part in this schismatic act!"*

