

CONVICTIONS



issue number 19 - July / August 2009

Special "Year for priests"

Dear readers,

On March 16, Pope Benedict XVI, during an audience granted to participants in the plenary assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy, announced the Year for the priests. The theme for the priestly year is "Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests." The opening of the year was scheduled with a celebration of vespers on June 19, the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the presence of the relic of the Curé of Ars, which was to be brought to Rome by Bishop Guy Bagnard of Belley-Ars. The closing ceremony will take place exactly one year later, with a World Meeting of Priests in St. Peter's Square. During this year, a directory for confessors and spiritual directors will be published, along with a compilation of texts by the Pope on the core issues of the life and mission of priests in modern times. Benedict XVI will officially proclaim St. Jean Marie Vianney as "patron saint of all the priests of the world."

We welcome
efforts by dedi-

EDITORIAL

the initiative of the Pope and join his
cating this issue of Convictions
to the priesthood. The articles
will strive to reveal the very nature
of the priesthood, to show
the dignity of this vocation, to
encourage the priests and to appeal

to the faithful to pray for priestly vocations and for the fidelity of priests: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send labourers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)

Speaking about the priesthood, first of all we have to mention its permanence. By his ordination the priest receives the sacramental character of the priesthood. He becomes a minister of Christ and enters into a permanent relationship with Him. This ontological sign is printed in his soul and can never be erased. Hence the bishop reminds the newly ordained: "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech." (Psalm 109:4) This reality affects already the way the young man prepares for the priesthood in the seminary. Later on, it marks the way he understands himself as a chaste spouse of the Church and spiritual father of the faithful. This supernatural mark distinguishes him from the laity; it places him above the flock of his faithful. He is much more than a simple functionary who performs during fixed hours ritual actions; his office exceeds that of an animator or the administrator of the parish: He is a mediator between God and man at every moment, in all situations and in all his activities.

The second principle we have to bring up is that the priest, whenever he administers the sacraments, acts "in persona Christi". In the sacraments it is not the priest himself who will give the grace. He is only the instrument: Christ has chosen him, and Christ will use his humanity to approach souls. The priest gives his tongue, his hands, and his entire person for the

service of Christ, who will be active and give His grace. This ability to be an instrument of Christ is a comfort to the faithful, inasmuch as they realize that their faith is not based on the personality of the priest, but rather on the Person of Christ working through the priest.

Another side of this is that, although the priest has received the sacerdotal character, he is obliged to keep working on his own personal character development as a man striving for holiness. He must act with caution and avoid the trap of functionalism or activism. Never may he become so busy that he forgets his priestly nature. He must remain supernaturally sensitive, grounding himself by being a man of prayer who encounters God through daily, silent meditation, desiring an ever more intimate relationship with Him.

Furthermore, the priest is not his own, but rather he belongs to and represents the Church. He acts "in persona Ecclesiae." He prays the Liturgy of the Hours, as he promised at his ordination, for the needs of the whole Church. Likewise, he embraces and hands down the teachings of the Church as the steward, not the master, of her truths. He is also proud - in the true sense - to be visibly recognizable as a priest, knowing that he is called to courageously be a sign and symbol pointing beyond himself to Christ. Everything the priest does is priestly and has an immense value, as Christ desires to work through him at all times. This happens in a particular way when preaching, shepherding, and healing God's people as their spiritual father.

Finally the priest should never stop working on his ongoing priestly formation. The Thomistic axiom, "agere sequitur esse" - doing follows being - is true for all priests; the more they understand their priestly identity, the more they will be able to act and serve in the manner Christ has called them. In the midst of full liturgical schedules, parish councils, leaking roofs and hospital visits, travelling from east to west and from north to south, the priest must continually open his heart and mind to Christ in prayer and study, annual retreats and seminars. This proper understanding does not guarantee fidelity or holiness, but it certainly is a strong foundation to build upon. Priests who have a clear understanding of this doctrine are more likely to be content in their ministry and joyful in their vocation.

O Lord, give us many holy priests!

Father Jürgen Wegner

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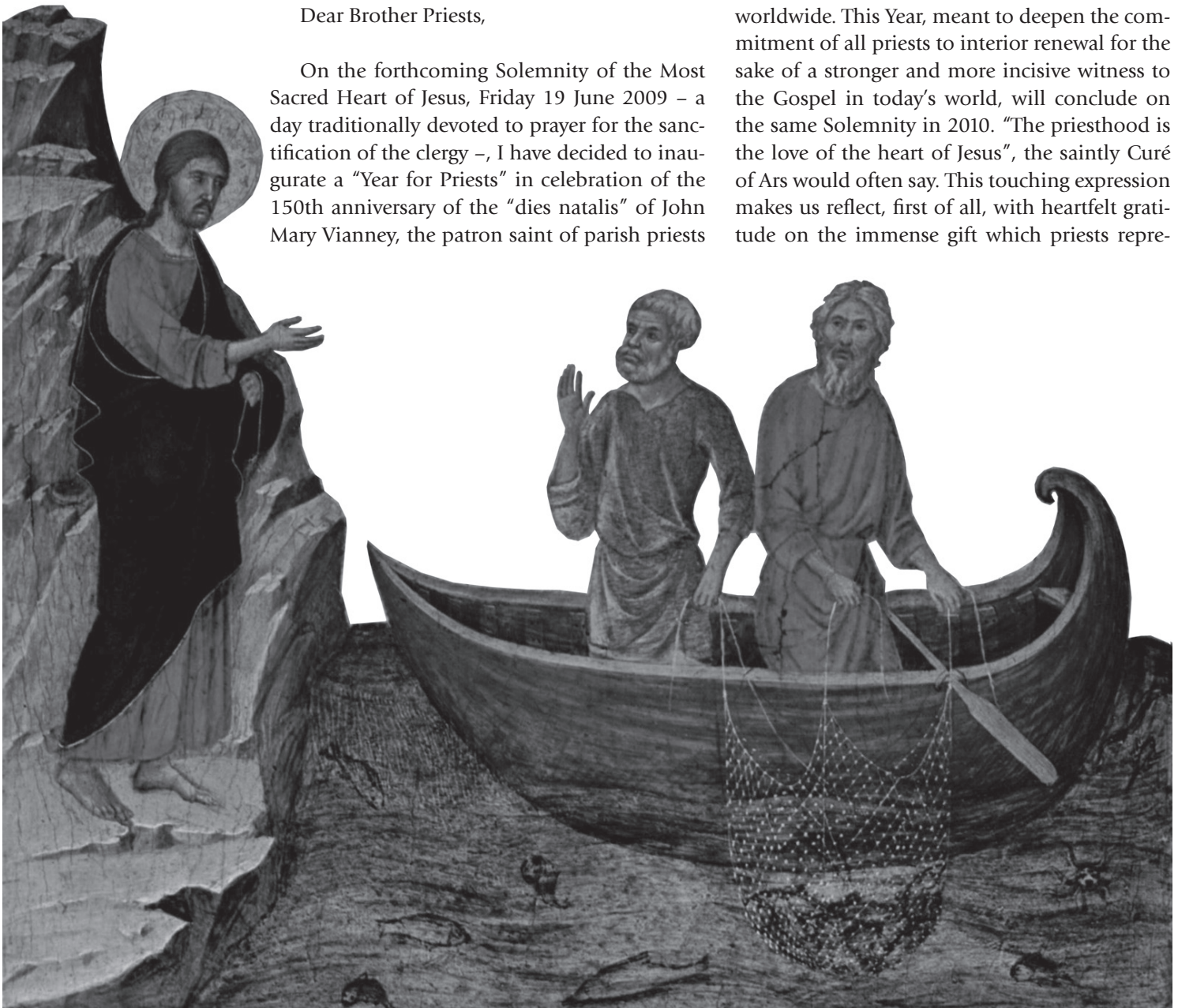
*Letter of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI proclaiming
a year for priests on the 150th anniversary of
the "Dies Natalis" of the Curé of Ars*

excerpt

Dear Brother Priests,

On the forthcoming Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Friday 19 June 2009 – a day traditionally devoted to prayer for the sanctification of the clergy –, I have decided to inaugurate a "Year for Priests" in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the "dies natalis" of John Mary Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests

worldwide. This Year, meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world, will conclude on the same Solemnity in 2010. "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus", the saintly Curé of Ars would often say. This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests repre-



sent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ's words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life. How can I not pay tribute to their apostolic labours, their tireless and hidden service, and their universal charity? And how can I not praise the courageous fidelity of so many priests who, even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as "friends of Christ", whom he has called by name, chosen and sent?

I still treasure the memory of the first parish priest at whose side I exercised my ministry as a young priest: he left me an example of unreserved devotion to his pastoral duties, even to meeting his own death in the act of bringing viaticum to a gravely ill person. I also recall the countless confreres whom I have met and continue to meet, not least in my pastoral visits to different countries: men generously dedicated to the daily exercise of their priestly ministry. Yet the expression of Saint John Mary also makes us think of Christ's pierced Heart and the crown of thorns which surrounds it. I also think, therefore, of the countless situations of suffering endured by many priests, either because they themselves share in the manifold human experience of pain or because they encounter misunderstanding from the very persons to whom they minister. How can we not also think of all those priests who are offended in their dignity, obstructed in their mission and persecuted, even at times to offering the supreme testimony of their own blood?

"O, how great is the priest!"

There are also, sad to say, situations which can never be sufficiently deplored where the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers. Then it is the world which finds grounds for scandal and rejection... Here the teaching and example of Saint John Mary Vianney can serve as a significant point of reference for us all. The Curé of Ars was very humble, yet as a priest he was conscious of being an immense gift to his people: "A good shepherd, a pastor after God's heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy". He spoke of the priesthood as if

incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the gift and task entrusted to a human creature: "O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...". Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: "Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest... After God, the priest is everything! ... Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is". These words, welling up from the priestly heart of the holy pastor, might sound excessive. Yet they reveal the high esteem in which he held the sacrament of the priesthood. He seemed overwhelmed by a boundless sense of responsibility: "Were we to fully realize what a priest is on earth, we would die: not of fright, but of love... Without the priest, the passion and death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption on earth... What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of his goods ... Leave a parish for twenty years without a priest, and they will end by worshipping the beasts there ... The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you".

"Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest.

Identification of the man with his ministry

He arrived in Ars, a village of 230 souls, warned by his Bishop beforehand that there he would find religious practice in a sorry state: "There is little love of God in that parish; you will be the one to put it there". As a result, he was deeply aware that he needed to go there to embody Christ's presence and to bear witness to his saving mercy: "[Lord,] grant me the conversion of my parish; I am willing to suffer whatever you wish, for my entire life!": with this prayer he entered upon his mission. The Curé devoted himself completely to his parish's conversion, setting before all else the Christian education of the people in his care. Dear brother priests, let us ask the Lord Jesus for the grace to learn for ourselves something of the pastoral plan of Saint John Mary Vianney! The first thing we need to learn is the complete identification of the man with his ministry. In Jesus, person and mission tend to coincide: all Christ's saving activity was, and is, an expression of his "filial consciousness" which from all eternity stands before the Father in an attitude of loving submission to his will. In a humble yet genuine way, every priest must aim for a similar identification. Certainly this is not to forget that the efficacy of the ministry is independent of the holiness of the minister; but neither can we overlook the extraordinary fruitfulness of the encounter between the ministry's objective holiness and the subjective holiness of the minister. The Curé of Ars immediately set about this patient and humble task of harmonizing his life as a minister with the holiness of the ministry he had received, by deciding to "live", physically, in his parish church: As his first biographer tells us: "Upon his arrival, he chose the church as his home. He entered the church before dawn and did not leave it until after the evening Angelus. There he was to be sought whenever needed".

Witness of his life

The pious excess of his devout biographer should not blind us to the fact that the Curé also knew how to "live" actively within the entire territory of his parish: he regularly visited the sick and families, organized popular missions and patronal feasts, collected and managed funds for charitable and missionary works, embellished and furnished his parish church, cared for the orphans and teachers of the "Providence" (an institute he founded); provided for the educa-

tion of children; founded confraternities and enlisted lay persons to work at his side.

...

Saint John Mary Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. It was from his example that they learned to pray, halting frequently before the tabernacle for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "One needs not say much to pray well" – the Curé explained to them – "We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to him, let us rejoice in his sacred presence. That is the best prayer". And he would urge them: "Come to communion, my brothers and sisters, come to Jesus. Come to live from him in order to live with him... "Of course you are not worthy of him, but you need him!" This way of educating the faithful to the Eucharistic presence and to communion proved most effective when they saw him celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Those present said that "it was not possible to find a finer example of worship... He gazed upon the Host with immense love". "All good works, taken together, do not equal the sacrifice of the Mass" – he would say – "since they are human works, while the Holy Mass is the work of God". He was convinced that the fervour of a priest's life depended entirely upon the Mass: "The reason why a priest is lax is that he does not pay attention to the Mass! My God, how we ought to pity a priest who celebrates as if he were engaged in something routine!" He was accustomed, when celebrating, also to offer his own life in sacrifice: "What a good thing it is for a priest each morning to offer himself to God in sacrifice!"

Victim of the confessional

This deep personal identification with the Sacrifice of the Cross led him – by a sole inward movement – from the altar to the confessional. Priests ought never to be resigned to empty confessionals or the apparent indifference of the faithful to this sacrament. In France, at the time of the Curé of Ars, confession was no more easy or frequent than in our own day, since the upheaval caused by the revolution had long inhibited the practice of religion. Yet he sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence. He thus created a "vir-

tuous" circle. By spending long hours in church before the tabernacle, he inspired the faithful to imitate him by coming to visit Jesus with the knowledge that their parish priest would be there, ready to listen and offer forgiveness. Later, the growing numbers of penitents from all over France would keep him in the confessional for up to sixteen hours a day. It was said that Ars had become "a great hospital of souls". His first biographer relates that "the grace he obtained [for the conversion of sinners] was so powerful that it would pursue them, not leaving them a moment of peace!" The saintly Curé reflected something of the same idea when he said: "It is not the sinner who returns to God to beg his forgiveness, but God himself who runs after the sinner and makes him return to him". "This good Saviour is so filled with love that he seeks us everywhere"

We priests should feel that the following words, which he put on the lips of Christ, are meant for each of us personally: "I will charge my ministers to proclaim to sinners that I am ever ready to welcome them, that my mercy is infinite". From Saint John Mary Vianney we can learn to put our unfailing trust in the sacrament of Penance, to set it once more at the centre of our pastoral concerns, and to take up the "dialogue of salvation" which it entails.

Hospital of souls

The Curé of Ars dealt with different penitents in different ways. Those who came to his confessional drawn by a deep and humble longing for God's forgiveness found in him the encouragement to plunge into the "flood of divine mercy" which sweeps everything away by its vehemence. If someone was troubled by the thought of his own frailty and inconstancy, and fearful of sinning again, the Curé would unveil the mystery of God's love in these beautiful and touching words: "The good Lord knows everything. Even before you confess, he already knows that you will sin again, yet he still forgives you. How great is the love of our God: he even forces himself to forget the future, so that he can grant us his forgiveness!". But to those who made a lukewarm and rather indifferent confession of sin, he clearly demonstrated by his own tears of pain how "abominable" this attitude was: "I weep because you don't weep", he would say. "If only the Lord were not so good! But he is so good! One would

have to be a brute to treat so good a Father this way!". He awakened repentance in the hearts of the lukewarm by forcing them to see God's own pain at their sins reflected in the face of the priest who was their confessor. To those who, on the other hand, came to him already desirous of and suited to a deeper spiritual life, he flung open the abyss of God's love, explaining the untold beauty of living in union with him and dwelling in his presence: "Everything in God's sight, everything with God, everything to please God... How beautiful it is!" And he taught them to pray: "My God, grant me the grace to love you as much as I possibly can".

Completely faithful to his own vocation

In his time the Curé of Ars was able to transform the hearts and the lives of so many people because he enabled them to experience the Lord's merciful love. Our own time urgently needs a similar proclamation and witness to the truth of Love: Deus caritas est (1 Jn: 4:8). Thanks to the word and the sacraments of Jesus, John Mary Vianney built up his flock, although he often trembled from a conviction of his personal inadequacy, and desired more than once to withdraw from the responsibilities of the parish ministry out of a sense of his unworthiness. Nonetheless, with exemplary obedience he never abandoned his post, consumed as he was by apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls. He sought to remain completely faithful to his own vocation and mission through the practice of an austere asceticism: "The great misfortune for us parish priests - he lamented - is that our souls grow tepid"; meaning by this that a pastor can grow dangerously inured to the state of sin or of indifference in which so many of his flock are living. He himself kept a tight rein on his body, with vigils and fasts, lest it rebel against his priestly soul. Nor did he avoid self-mortification for the good of the souls in his care and as a help to expiating the many sins he heard in confession. To

"The reason why a priest is lax is that he does not pay attention to the Mass! My God, how we ought to pity a priest who celebrates as if he were engaged in something routine!"

a priestly confrere he explained: "I will tell you my recipe: I give sinners a small penance and the rest I do in their place". Aside from the actual penances which the Curé of Ars practiced, the core of his teaching remains valid for each of us: souls have been won at the price of Jesus' own blood, and a priest cannot devote himself to their salvation if he refuses to share personally in the "precious cost" of redemption.

In today's world, as in the troubled times of the Curé of Ars, the lives and activity of priests need to be distinguished by a determined witness to the Gospel. As Pope Paul VI rightly noted, "modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses". Lest we experience existential emptiness and the effectiveness of our ministry be compromised, we need to ask ourselves ever anew: "Are we truly pervaded by the word of God? Is that word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that word? Do we love it? Are we deeply engaged with this word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?" (Benedict XVI, Homily at the Chrism Mass, 9 April 2009) Just as Jesus called the Twelve to be with him (cf. Mk 3:14), and only later sent them forth to preach, so too in our days priests are called to assimilate that "new style of life" which was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus and taken up by the Apostles. (Benedict XVI, Homily for the Vigil of Pentecost, 3 June 2006)

...

Dear brother priests, the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney (1859) follows upon the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Lourdes (1858). In 1959 Blessed Pope John XXIII noted that "shortly before the Curé of Ars completed his long and admirable life, the Immaculate Virgin appeared in another part of France to an innocent and humble girl, and entrusted to her a message of prayer and penance which continues, even a century later, to yield immense spiritual fruits. The life of this holy priest whose centenary we are commemorating in a real way anticipated the great supernatural truths taught to the seer of Massabielle. He was greatly devoted to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin; in 1836 he had dedicated his parish church to Our Lady Conceived with-

out Sin and he greeted the dogmatic definition of this truth in 1854 with deep faith and great joy." The Curé would always remind his faithful that "after giving us all he could, Jesus Christ wishes in addition to bequeath us his most precious possession, his Blessed Mother".

To the Most Holy Virgin I entrust this Year for Priests. I ask her to awaken in the heart of every priest a generous and renewed commitment to the ideal of complete self-oblation to Christ and the Church which inspired the thoughts and actions of the saintly Curé of Ars. It was his fervent prayer life and his impassioned love of Christ Crucified that enabled John Mary Vianney to grow daily in his total self-oblation to God and the Church. May his example lead all priests to offer that witness of unity with their Bishop, with one another and with the lay faithful, which today, as ever, is so necessary. Despite all the evil present in our world, the words which Christ spoke to his Apostles in the Upper Room continue to inspire us: "In the world you have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). Our faith in the Divine Master gives us the strength to look to the future with confidence. Dear priests, Christ is counting on you. In the footsteps of the Curé of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by him. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace!

With my blessing.

From the Vatican, 16 June 2009.

BENEDICTVS PP. XVI

Priests for tomorrow

"Priests for tomorrow" is the text of a conference given by His Lordship Marcel Lefebvre at the Palais de la Mutualité at Paris on March 29, 1973. His Lordship was invited by the "Union des Intellectuels indépendants" and by the "Club de la Culture française".

Excerpts

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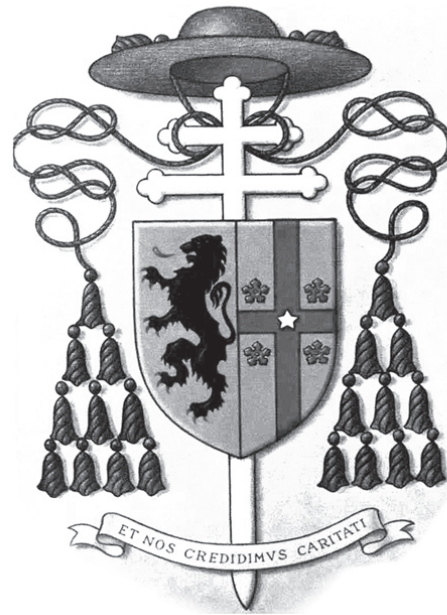
We therefore hope to form groups who will return to their countries, embark on apostolic work by agreement with the local bishops, and perhaps found houses of the Society in their different countries and thus restore a sound training to the young people anxious for it. They are to be found everywhere; it is wonderful! I assure you that you will be welcome at Econe if ever you come to Switzerland. Among those in our gathering here this evening there are several people who have been there already and who could bear witness to the right spirit in these young men, whatever their nationality. They are all admirably disposed to be good and true priests, to be apostles in their countries, not trouble-makers, not embittered, not commandos breathing strife. There is no question of setting up a seminary for commandos. It is a question of making priests who love their priesthood. And if you ask me the specific question: What is the general trend of the training you give them? I should like to answer you briefly, for I believe it very important to know what things a priest should know and what he should be to avoid falling into those errors which are all about us today, and which invade us from all sides.

We ask of our seminarians that they help the Church, that they love their Mother the Church. A priest exists for the Church, he is the Church's son, her beloved son. He must therefore love his

mother. But to love her he must know her. She must not be disfigured and distorted. Today the Catholic Church is being distorted! How is she being distorted? I will be brief (it is not my intention here to give you a long course of theology), but I think you have enough faith and enough knowledge of your faith to understand what I am about to say.

Unam, Sanctam

The Church is the only society founded by our Lord for our salvation. The Church is not a society merely useful for our salvation, but indispensable and necessary for our salvation. Without the Church we cannot be saved; we cannot reach heaven or attain eternal life save through the Church. You will say: "Then, Your Excellency, will no Protestant, no Moslem, no Buddhist, no Animist be saved?" I did not say that, but, do say, I affirm and reaffirm, since it is not I who speak, but the Church, which has always proclaimed and always believed it, that none, not even among the Moslems, not even among the Protestants, not even among the Animists, can be saved save through the grace of the Catholic Church, save through the grace of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is but one cross through which one may be saved, and this cross is given to the Catholic Church. It is not given to the others. This cross and this sacrifice of the cross are continued on our altars, and it is precisely this which is the heart of the Church, which is the



reason for the Church's very existence. All graces come to us through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Lord has but one mystic Bride, that is the holy Catholic Church. Without doubt souls are saved outside the Church visible, but you are well aware that there are three baptisms, the baptism of water, the baptism of blood and the baptism of desire.



...
God knows all souls, and for that reason knows that in Protestant communions, in Moslem communions, in Buddhist communions, in all humanity, there are souls of good will. God knows the souls disposed to serve Him, disposed to do His holy will. By the very fact that they seek to do His holy will, they have the implicit baptism of desire-baptism, which is the means of joining the Church. These souls do not realize it, but they receive the grace of baptism through the Catholic Church; they cannot receive a grace outside the Catholic Church. One cannot be saved by Islam, by Buddhism or by Protestantism-one is not saved by error. There is no Buddhist Church in heaven, there is no Protestant Church in heaven, there is no Moslem Church in heaven; there is only one Church in heaven, the Catholic Church. God Himself founded it. These may seem hard sayings but they are the truth. It was not I who founded the Church, it was our Lord, it was the Son of God, it was He who created it. And we are obliged, we priests, to

tell the truth. One may be saved within Protestantism, within Buddhism, within any religion whatsoever, but one cannot be saved by that religion! The difference is enormous. One may be saved within these religions, not by these religions.

...

Can you then see how important it is that seminarians should have a clear idea of what the Catholic Church is? The Catholic Church is the only ladder that reaches heaven. It is the only way. No name other than that of our Lord Jesus Christ can save us.

Sacrifice of the Mass

Another very important truth, capital for priests, is precisely what the sacrifice of the Mass is. Nothing is more important! One may not distort the sacrifice of the Mass without profoundly affecting the priesthood itself.

It is obviously clear that the liturgical reforms of our day tend – I say tend advisedly – to replace the idea and the reality of the sacrifice by the reality of a meal. Thus, one speaks of the celebration of the Eucharist, of the Eucharistic meal, of the Supper, but the term “sacrifice” is far less often used and is even disappearing from the wording of our catechisms, disappearing from the habitual language of preachers when mention is made of the sacrifice of the Mass. Now, this is a fundamental, capital, error. This is the Protestant error exactly. That is what the Protestants have done, and it is that which distinguishes them from Catholics. It was that which, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries made Catholics pass from Catholicism to Protestantism. They distorted the sacrifice of the Mass and made of it a meal, nothing but a meal. They immediately replaced the altar by a table, and made the president of the assembly turn to face the faithful. They did away with the crucifix – exactly what we, alas, are doing today, and it is serious, very serious, for the Mass is a sacrifice! If Protestants say it is blasphemy so to describe it, how do they explain it? Protestants say there is only one sacrifice, that of the cross, and it is through belief in the sacrifice of the cross that we draw into ourselves the merits of the cross, and that we cover our sins. Our sins are covered – for they do not believe in an inward renewal. No, they believe that the merits of our Lord “cover” our sins. The Catholic Church says no, no.

Source of all graces

True, the sacrifice of the Cross is the source of all graces, but this sacrifice of the cross continues on our altars, in reality, with the same priest and the same victim. It is the same sacrifice mystically realized through the separation of Body and Blood in the species of bread and wine, no longer in a bloody manner; but it is the same reality, exactly the same sacrifice carried out on the altar and performed specifically to apply the merits of the cross to the souls there present and to preserve this lasting and infinite source of grace, maintain it always and bring it down upon souls living in time and space! That is why the Church has always sought to increase the number of priests so that these sacrifices may multiply the graces of conversion while multiplying the graces of our own conversion. This is utterly different from the Protestant conception.

...

Such is the great mystery of the Christian religion; all else is linked to that since there can be no true priesthood if there is no sacrifice.

Why does the priest receive a character distinguishing him from all others? It is because he has the power to bring down God Himself, the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, in the Holy Eucharist. Why must the priest remain celibate? Because he has power over God Himself. What other creature has power such as that? The priest himself can never conceive the sublimity, the greatness of his power. When one reflects that by the simple words of the Consecration he is able to make God obey his words! God obeys his words. He has promised that He will obey the priest's words! It is then meet, right, and just that the priest should be celibate, that the priest should be virgin as was the Virgin Mary also. It was needful that the Virgin Mary should be a virgin since she too had power over God; when she uttered her Fiat, God came down into her womb. Beings who have such a power over God should remain virgin.

Beauty of the priesthood

Such is the greatness of the priesthood. It is therein that all the beauty of the priesthood lies. All else is secondary, should I say, and follows by reason of this sacrifice of the Mass. This is likewise true of monks and nuns. It is not surprising that there are no more vocations of men and women to religious life. What is a religious man

The steps to the priesthood

The taking of the cassock:

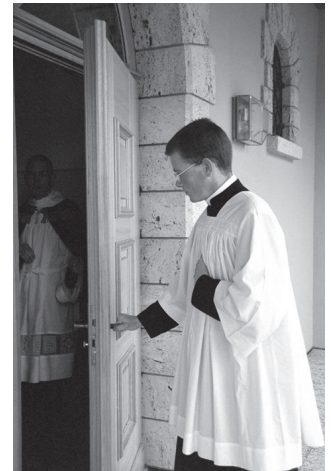
a young man, after prayer, reflection and counsel, decides to turn away from the things of the world. He clothes himself in a black cassock, a symbol of death to the world.



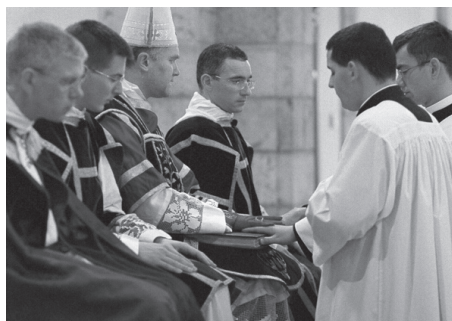
The tonsure:

The Church officially adopts the seminarian as its own child. The ceremony originates from an ancient Roman ceremony for the adoption of children. The hair is cut in the front, in the back, at the left and at the right of the head in the form of a cross.

The porter: The ostiary is the first of the four minor orders; it confers the duty to guard the house of God and all that is found therein. The seminarian touches the keys of the sacristy and of the church, rings the bell, and opens and closes the door of the church in a symbolic practice of his new office.



The lector: The lectorate is the second minor order; it is received immediately after the first. Kneeling in front of the bishop, the ordinand places his right hand on the lectionary, his thumb



touching the ledge. The lector has the privilege of singing the lessons of the Old Testament.

The exorcist: the third minor order is that of exorcist; it gives the power to expel demons. This power is very real, but it is not habitually used except for certain blessings (as for holy water) and during Baptism. Only the priest who has received explicit permission from his bishop may do the solemn exorcism of one possessed.

[continued p. 13]

or woman? A person who offers his or her life as a victim with the Victim who offers Himself on the altar. That is what a religious is, nothing else. It is that which is the foundation of all religious life. If there is no longer a victim on the altar, if there is no longer a sacrifice on the altar, there is no longer a reason for the existence of religious. And it is not astonishing that there are no more of them. It is very serious.

...

You must understand that everything rests on this sacrifice of the Mass, which is the treasure bequeathed by our Lord dying on the Cross. He gave His treasure – His Body, His Soul, His Divinity. He gave it to the Catholic Church on the altar of sacrifice.

Why, then, have our altars been carried away? Why have they been replaced by a table? Why has the Mass been replaced just by a supper? If it is only a supper, Communion in the hand is natural. If there is now no Real Presence, if there is no sacrifice, it is natural to communicate standing, because in that case it is a remembrance merely. They break the bread of friendship, of the meal, of the common faith; faith, perhaps, in the spiritual presence of our Lord, as a remembrance of our Lord – all that is understandable! Only, one is no longer sure whether the Real Presence of our Lord is in question, the presence of our God Himself, of our Creator and our Redeemer, of Him who is our All, who is the very reason for our life on this earth. Then it is not natural that we should communicate standing as though we were His equal.

...

Abuses? No, reality!

When we are answered: "Ah! but you are talking of abuses. Those are the people who do not keep the rule." To my regret, I must answer, Unhappily no. They are not abuses. Look at the little leaflet "Masses for Small Groups and for Particular Groups." It contains rules laid down by the Episcopate, which, consequently, leave the door open to all abuses. That must be so since, for these group masses, there need be only a reading from the Gospel and the recitation of one of the four Canons - and three more are added ad experimentum - for children! Not to mention that before long, one may legitimately make one's own Canon. As yet, however, we need still say one of the four Canons and one Gospel. All else

is open to the choice of the priest who "presides over the assembly." He may begin the Mass as he pleases, say the Offertory as he pleases, and "make up prayers" (that is the wording used). "Where prayers are concerned, it is permissible to choose from the missal those best suited to the group. If it seems necessary, the text of these prayers may be adapted to the purpose of the assembly and the chosen theme. In certain cases [and there will clearly always be "certain cases"] it may be appropriate to make up new prayers." On such an occasion I shall ask the Episcopal Conference to let me make my own texts, that is, to take them from Tradition!

Since it is a matter of legal experiments authorized by the episcopal decrees, I ask to make the experiment of Tradition. I cannot see any reason for refusal! That is why at the seminary we always say the Mass of St. Pius V. No doubt that is one of the reproaches made against us. We are told: "You should adopt the new Ordo, you are failing in obedience." I am obedient to the bishops' directives, I am in perfect obedience. Here, for instance, is another recommendation touching small groups: "One may envisage special groups with a pastoral intention or a specific pastoral goal - students, apprentices." We are students, we have students, we are therefore fully in order. We must not be led to absurd lengths! We are perfectly prepared to acknowledge all that must be acknowledged, but let no man say to us: "You have a right to devise any prayers save those of Tradition." That we will not accept.

Causes divisions

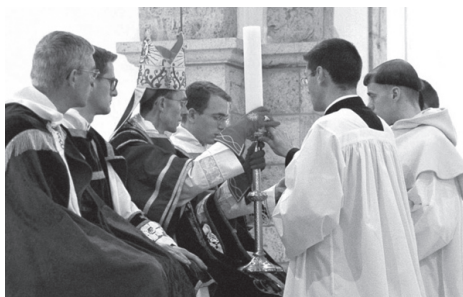
It is for these reasons that we are fully convinced that we are in no way disobedient to the hierarchy in not adopting the new Mass. I will go farther. I shall never say that the new Ordo Missae is heretical; I shall never say that it cannot be a sacrifice. I believe that many priests - above all those priests who have known the old Ordo - certainly have very good intentions in saying their Mass. Far be it from me to say that everything is wrong with the new Ordo. I do say, however, that this new Ordo opens the door to very many choices and divisions. It follows that if, today, I were to offer these choices to my seminarians, ten might opt for the first Canon, two others the second, another the third: the professors would want to order the liturgy in one

way or another. It would be the beginning of the end. We should all be divided, and it would only remain to me to lock the doors of the seminary. The seminary would go the way of all the others, for we cannot live divided; and, by its very nature, the new Ordo divides because it allows too great freedom of choice and makes too many things legal. It is only natural! Some people will want a table, some will want to face the congregation when saying Mass. Some will want to follow today's practice and say Mass with only one deacon, others with a deacon and subdeacon. There will be no end to it. Some will want concelebration, others will not. There would be no way out, and once division has been sown in all that is most great, most important, and most beautiful in the Church, all is lost. We, for our part, have chosen to keep what has been the bond of unity through all the ages and, we believe, can still preserve it for the future.

Catholic doctrine

Finally, I come to the third important truth that we teach our seminarians; we want to put the true catechism into their hands. We want to give them the true faith. We do not want these seminarians to be a prey to any doubts on the Truth which should be taught them. We do not want them to be forever engaged in research. Today, there is nothing but that. We are all engaged in search as though we had never been given the Credo, as if our Savior had not come to bring us the Truth. We should always remember this, for it is a truth taught by our Holy Church - the deposit of Revelation came to a close on the day when the last Apostle died. The deposit therefore existed. When our Holy Father Pope Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, he said precisely that it was in the deposit of Revelation, that it already existed in all the texts revealed to us before the death of the last Apostle. A truth cannot be defined, neither the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin nor, perhaps one day, her Mediation, without stating that it is to be found in the deposit of Revelation, hence before the death of the last of the Apostles. That is very important.

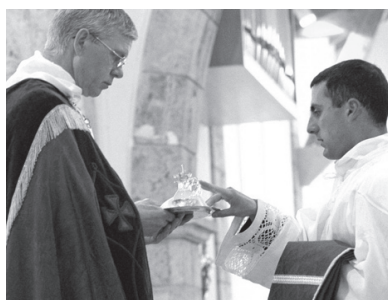
As a result, these truths cannot be changed. After the death of the last of the Apostles it was the part of the Church to transmit Tradition, to



During the ceremony of ordination to be an exorcist, the seminarian touches the ritual which the bishop presents to him.

The acolyte: the fourth and last of the minor orders is that of acolyte. The candidate receives a candlestick of which the candle is not lighted, with the following words of the bishop: "Receive". Then the bishop gives him an empty cruet and says to him: "Receive". In our times, due to the growing scarcity of ordained acolytes, men are authorized to serve at the altar.

The subdeacon: The subdiaconate is the first of the major orders. It is a decisive step in the life of the cleric who from then on takes upon himself the obligation to observe irrevocably perfect chastity and to recite the Divine Office. The subdeacon sings the epistle, presents the chalice and the paten to the deacon during the solemn Mass, pours the drop of water into the chalice, and purifies the altar linens. During the ceremony, the candidate prostrates himself at the singing of the Litany of the Saints and then goes forward a step to express his irrevocable engagement in the Holy Militia. When just ordained, he touches the chalice and the paten, and a pair of cruets containing the wine and the water. Afterwards, he is clothed with the insignia of his office: the amice (which symbolizes moderation in speaking), the maniple (which symbolizes good works), and the tunic (which symbolizes joy); and then he touches the epistolary presented by the bishop.



Afterwards, he is clothed with the insignia of his office: the amice (which symbolizes moderation in speaking), the maniple (which symbolizes good works), and the tunic (which symbolizes joy); and then he touches the epistolary presented by the bishop.

The deacon: The diaconate is the second major order. The newly ordained may now sing the Gospel, preach, assist the priest during the solemn Mass, give the sacrament of Baptism, distribute Communion, and even officiate the ceremony of burial (except the Mass). The order is conferred with the imposition of hands followed by the words: "Pour out upon them Thy Holy Spirit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, who fortifies them through the seven gifts of grace for the faithful accomplishment" [continued p. 15]



transmit the deposit of faith, by searching out all the truths contained within it and by explaining them ever more clearly, more beautifully, more greatly, but never by adding a single dogma. After the death of the last Apostle all had been said. We have no right to speak today of the evolution of dogma, to say the dogma is constantly evolving. Not so. Dogma remains what it was after the death of the last of the Apostles, and it is the function of the pope, of bishops, and priests to transmit this deposit to all generations. That is it. Holy Church is herself Tradition.

...

How was Revelation transmitted? There was Tradition, oral Tradition, through Titus, through Timothy, through all the bishops appointed by the Apostles. To them they handed on the Revelation that was later written in the Gospels. Truly, the Gospels were inspired. The same people tell us today: "You know that Tradition and the magisterium of the Church are too complicated. We must keep to the Gospels." It is these same people who ask: "What inspiration is there in the Gospel? Only those truths necessary for our salvation!" That is what they say.

At the Council there was a battle over the phrase "only the truths which are necessary for our salvation." It follows that all the miracles, all the stories of the childhood, all the accounts not "necessary for our salvation" are not inspired. Only the truths necessary for our salvation are inspired. That is entirely false. The whole of the Gospel is inspired, the whole Gospel was inspired by our Lord. The question is not simply one of infallibility. As you know, infallibility is simply a protection against error. The pope cannot, *ex cathedra*, proclaim an error, but this is no more than a protection against error. That is not what is meant by the inspiration of the Gospel. The mind and spirit of the writers of the Gospel were really under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Hence, everything written in the Gospel is the Word of God, "Verbum Dei – the Word of God."

No right to choose

That is a certainty. Today we have no right to choose and say: "Well, we will accept this part, we will not accept this other." But, I reiterate, even though the Gospel is inspired by God, it is Tradition that transmits the Gospel. It is by Tradition, by the magisterium of the Church, that

the Gospel came to us and has been transmitted to us throughout the centuries. And it is for Tradition and for the magisterium of the Church, which, if I may so express it, embody the Gospel, to explain to us the content of the Gospel and its meaning. If there is none to interpret the Gospel, many of us may attach wholly contrary meanings to the same words, and then we would fall into private judgment, freedom of inspiration, and all the Pentecostalism of today, which propels us into the realm of the arbitrary! All this, too, is very serious. Our seminarians must be brought to realize this fully and to learn the nature of the Church's magisterium and what it has always taught. All councils save this last have been dogmatic councils. Those dogmatic councils gave us the exact expression of Tradition, the exact terms of what the Apostles taught. That is unalterable. The decrees of the Council of Trent are unalterable because they are infallible. They were written and proclaimed as embodying the faith coming down to us by Tradition and this by an official act of the Church. Thus they are wholly free from error. We must believe them. But the last council, which was a pastoral council (as the popes themselves have repeatedly said), was averse from being dogmatic, and its various propositions may therefore be discussed. These propositions are not infallible because the popes would not invoke their infallibility. That is exceedingly important.

This is briefly what we wish to inculcate into our students: a love and understanding of their Church and a knowledge of what she means for them. They should learn to love also their sacrifice of the Mass, the sacraments, and that evangelization which proceeds from the faith - the faith which they must communicate to others, a sure faith based on the Tradition and the magisterium of the Church. That is the training we seek to give our seminarians and the true sacerdotal upbringing we hope to give them.

...

of their ministry." The deacon is then clothed with the insignia of his office: the stole (symbolizes the sweet yoke of the law of God) and the dalmatic (symbolizes joy and justice); then he touches the evangeliarium, presented by the bishop.



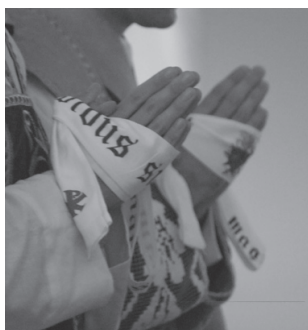
through the sacraments and the sacramentals). The ordination, properly speaking, takes place between the epistle and the Alleluia. The matter of the sacrament is the imposition of the hands by the bishop. The form is the words following the consecratory preface: "Almighty Father, we beseech Thee, give to Thy servants here present the dignity of the priesthood; renew in their hearts the spirit of holiness, that they may keep the rank in Thy service which they have received from Thee, and by their conduct may afford a pattern of holy living". All the other rites of the ceremony of ordination (the anointing of the hands, etc...) explain the meaning of the priestly powers.

The investiture with the priestly vestments: "Take thou the yoke of the Lord, for His yoke is sweet, and His burden light." "Take thou the priestly vestment, whereby charity is signified; for God is powerful to give thee an increase of charity and its perfect works."



The anointing of the hands:

"Be pleased, O Lord, to consecrate and hallow these hands by this anointing, and our blessing (...) that whatsoever they bless may be blessed, and whatsoever they consecrate may be consecrated and hallowed, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ."



The priest: the priesthood is the third major order. It is the greatest that can be conferred upon a man in the state of grace. This sacrament confers an indelible mark and makes the priest an "other Christ" having power on the physical body of Christ (power of consecration of the holy species) and on the mystical body (power to confer grace on the faithful



The handing over of the instruments

(chalice filled with wine and water and paten with host not consecrated): "Receive the power to offer Sacrifice to God, and to celebrate Mass, both for the living and the dead, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ."



The concelebration:

the very first Mass of a new priest is that which he concelebrates with the bishop. He recites the prayers at the same time as the celebrant, while an assistant priest stays at his side.

The unfolding of the chasuble:

After the ablutions, the bishop unfolds the chasuble to express the power to forgive sins: "Receive the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

The promise of obedience:

Do you promise to your Bishop reverence and obedience? – I do promise!

The conclusion:

The ceremony concludes with a last exhortation, a special benediction and, of course, a vibrant Te Deum.



Priestly Sanctity

In order to lead a truly priestly life, it is above all important to have a right idea of priestly sanctity. If we lack conviction on this point, we will not take the necessary means to live in conformity with our vocation, because we will not clearly see the degree of sanctification to which we must strive. The more this degree is elevated, the more difficult it is to achieve, and we will not strive effectively if our convictions are not sufficiently formed. Therefore, let us look at what we are by our state, and what we must be through virtue. In order to better know the nature of priestly sanctity, let us consider the priest: in comparison with Jesus Christ.

Fr. Médard Bie-Bibang

In comparison with Jesus Christ

We are His ministers, His ambassadors, as St. Paul expresses it: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (Cor. IV, 1). Our mission is to continue His work, which is a work of love. During His entire life, Jesus has shown the benefits of His charity, instructing the ignorant, healing the sick, converting sinners, consoling the afflicted, opening to everyone the prospect of the kingdom of heaven. He consummated his sacrifice by a supreme act of love. And when the hour had come to ascend to His Father, He chose a minister of whom he would make an heir of His spirit: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," and whom He would send in His place.

This minister, this "alter Christus," is the priest. Upon him, Jesus concentrates His benefits. All that which He has of charity for souls, He directs first on the priest, so that in turn, the priest may cause souls to feel the salutary effects. To him Our Lord reserves a greater intimacy. "I will not now call you servants, but my friends" (St. John XV, 15).

To him, He confers powers which are wholly divine: powers to teach with authority, to command in His name, to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross, to forgive sins, to cause divine blessings to descend upon men. It is entirely the mission

of Christ which is confided to the priest. And for him to be able to accomplish this effectively, Jesus unites Himself intimately to him through a divine character which arrays him with His authority. He communicates to him in abundance the gifts of the Holy Ghost; He causes him to live separate from the world, so that animated with His charity, he would be in a state to fulfill the sublime mission towards men, to which he is responsible.

Let us endeavour therefore to understand that which our priesthood requires of us, so that we will be able to respond fully to the designs of God in spite of our weakness. That which He demands above all is holiness of life, to which we must strive with all the energies of our soul, aided by the grace from on High.

Tendency to sanctity

The priest has a tendency towards sanctity; everyone agrees to this. But where there is less agreement, is to know the degree of sanctity to which he is obliged.

There is a minimum of sanctity, which consists in simply the habitual state of grace. But the habitual state of grace may subsist with habits of venial sin, with attachments, probably slight, but that we do not wish to break, in short, with a very harmful and dangerous state of lukewarmness. Priestly sanctity would not know how to

adapt to all these weaknesses; it demands that we work to overcome them and that we tend towards perfection. The Code of Canon Law sums up on this question the doctrine of the Church in this very significant sentence: "The clergy must lead a life, both exterior and interior, more holy than the laity, and excel in virtue and in good actions so as to be an example to them" (CIC 1917, can. 124).

Therefore, let us try to really convince ourselves of the necessity of a holiness of life that would not be ordinary, but that would reach a high degree of perfection. It is our duty: first to Our Lord whom we represent, then to the obligations for which we are responsible, and finally to the souls that we must save.

As we have already mentioned above, Jesus has given us the distinguished honour of making us participants of His priesthood. He has called us therein through a special vocation. He has preserved us from the contagion of the century, and directed us into the paths of which He alone knows the secret; He has invested us, through the sacred rite of ordination, with His character and with His powers. Through these, He wishes to show us the intimate union which He wants to have with us. What sentiments must arise in our souls from such exalted prerogatives! May this consideration inspire us with an attitude of profound thanksgiving to the divine mercy who has called us, in spite of our unworthiness, to such a sublime and eminent vocation. But with all these truly extraordinary graces which He has granted to us, have we not an obligation to lead a holy life, and of a holiness that would not be common? "I will not now call you servants, but My friends..." When

Jesus calls us His friends, does He not want that there be between Him and us an entire agreement of opinions? Without that, the friendship would not be perfect, because, either it imagines the resemblance, or else it must procure it. It is of great necessity, then, that we be animated by the Spirit of Our Lord, if we wish to be entitled to the singular affection of His Heart.

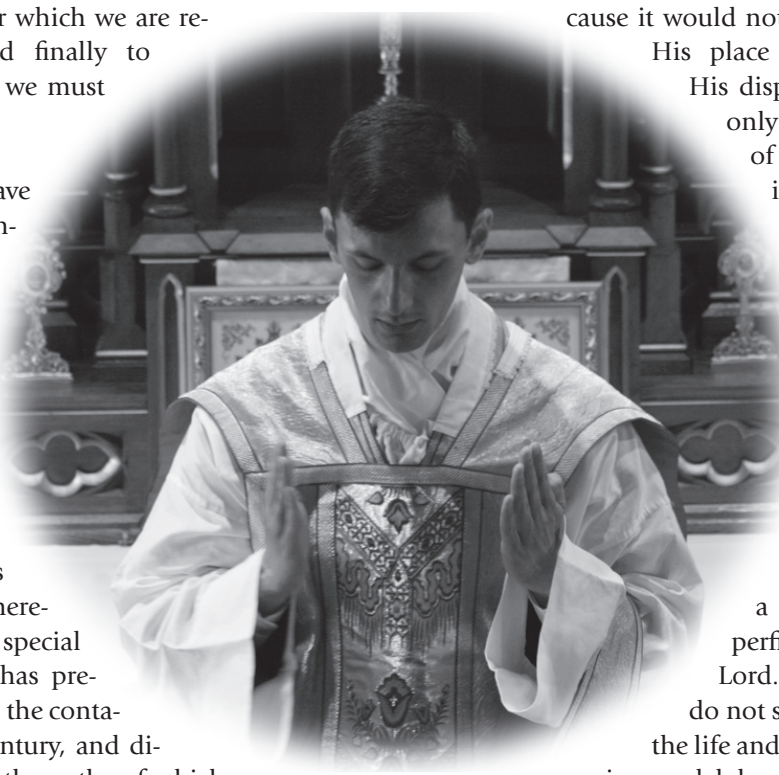
Not only does Jesus call us His friends, but what is more, He sends us as His ministers and His ambassadors. We take His place here below and we represent Him to the eyes of the faithful. On this account, we are obliged to make His life and His virtues shine in ourselves, because it would not be right to take

His place without having His dispositions, and to only show to the eyes of the faithful the image of a Christ weakened, imperfect, would have nothing, so to speak, in common with Him whom we represent.

The faithful today have only a vague and superficial idea of Our Lord. Therefore if we do not show in ourselves the life and virtues of our divine model, how will they have a veritable idea? What is more, how can we worthily carry out His work? For, an ambassador does not act in his own name, but in the name of he who has sent him. He must, therefore, set aside his own tastes and his inclinations, in order to take up the interests of his master. Therefore, if we do not have the spirit of Our Lord, how will we be in the state to carry out His work of the salvation and the sanctification of souls?

Saints because of our functions

Secondly, the nature of our functions calls for a great sanctity. There must be a true conformity between the dignity of life and the ministries that we have to fulfill. Now, the duties of



the priest are altogether supernatural and holy. Destined to produce grace in souls, they require a great spirit of faith, a strong feeling of religion, a perfect purity; all things which are not compatible with a life of routine and of lukewarmness. God, in the Old Law, gave the priests the obligation to lead a holy life, because they carried the vessels of the Lord. How much more would He demand this priestly sanctity for the New Testament, of which the Old Testament was just a figure?

And is not this what the Pontifical repeats in all its forms in the ceremonies of ordination? For the minor orders, it points out that being higher than the faithful, and carrying in their hands the lighted candle, they must shine with a holy life, in order to bring light by their example to the Church of God. What virtues are not demanded of those who receive the major Orders! The bishop multiplies the formulas, he employs the most strong expressions. He makes the prayers the most ardent, for these new ministers, so that they lead a life conforming to the sanctity of the orders received.

This necessity for a holy life appears most especially in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice. The Pontiff, in the ceremony of ordination, informs the ordinands: "Be well aware of that which you do, and depict in your life that which you accomplish at the altar. For, you renew therein each day the mystery of the death of Jesus. Therefore, put to death in yourselves, the vices and the concupiscences." Consequently, before the priest ascends to the altar, the Church adorns him with symbolic vestments, emblems of purity and of charity. At the foot of the altar, She stipulates that he make the humble avowal of his unworthiness. All during the Mass, She multiplies on his lips expressions of humility, obliges him to strike his breast, to bow his head, to often make a genuflection, so that he will understand that, in order to assist Jesus by his ministry of sanctifier, he must take part in the sentiments of the divine Victim, and have pure hands, holy lips and an immaculate heart.

Saints because of the souls

Finally, sanctity is essential for us in order to procure the salvation of souls. Of all works, this is the most difficult. It's a matter of changing the wills which are naturally inclined to evil, the

souls which are drugged by the world, the souls which sometimes have lived for a long while in sin, which are under the influence of bad habits, which have lost all resort, and which feel their faith diminishing; it's a matter of changing these wills and of returning them towards the good. How can they be convinced, how can they be influenced? For this, there must be zeal, but a zeal which is expressed by a convincing word, by an ardent exhortation, by patient action, and sometimes even followed by a sort of battle. It's not enough to show a sinner a better way, so that he will follow it. The exhortations, the efforts, are often not enough to help a soul abandon a dangerous occasion, to break a bad habit. What self sacrifice and what patience, to bring back to the faith, to the practice of religion, the hardened sinners. But the priest who is not holy will not have the zeal of the good shepherd who runs after the lost sheep.

To save souls there must be the example. The more sinners are withdrawn from God, the more they need, in order to bring them back, the example of exalted virtue. What is it that causes the spiritual conquest of the world? What is it that brings about, even today, the great works of conversion? It is the brilliant virtues of the apostles, of the missionaries, of the holy priests. There must always be, in a shepherd, a higher degree of perfection than that which he wishes to obtain from the people. A superior virtue in the shepherd, will only obtain from the flock an average virtue. A mediocre virtue will have almost no effect. Thus, if we would like to lead the wayward to their duties, to pull away from the heart of the miser the passion of riches, to make the proud bow down their heads, then let us first cause the contrary virtues to be resplendent in ourselves. "A priest," says the "Imitation of Christ", "must be adorned with all the virtues. His life must not be like to that of the common people, but like to that of the angels in heaven and of the perfect men on earth."

Finally, to save souls, there must be prayer. Saint Bernard puts it in the first place: "Three things are left," he said, "the word, the example, and the prayer; the greatest of these three is the prayer." Without doubt, it must not be a mediocre prayer, but that which is prompted by all the proper dispositions to assure it of its effectiveness. Now the priest who is not a saint, hardly

ever prays, and he prays poorly. He celebrates the Mass with tepidity, says his breviary as a matter of routine, and omits most of his exercises of devotion. And because his prayer is without life, it is deprived of the greatest part of its virtue. How different is the prayer of the holy priest, who, in the ardour of his zeal, intercedes for sinners, multiplies his supplications, and strives to storm heaven in order to obtain mercy.

Let us conclude, then, that in order to save souls, holiness of life is necessary for the priest, and that, without it, he could not be a perfect image of Jesus Christ, nor fulfill excellently his august functions. And this sanctity must not be understood as a common and average virtue, but as a high degree of perfection.

In a position to effect the sanctity

After having contemplated the nature of priestly sanctity, after having meditated on the obligation of sanctity for the priest we could be tempted by discouragement to say: "God does not demand the impossible." To this, I respond with Saint Paul: "That which is impossible to men is possible to God." It is then with the grace of God that we will be in a position to effect that which is humanly impossible to our fallen nature. Let us penetrate entirely these other words of the apostle to the gentiles: "With the grace of God, I can do all things." The works of God never miss their goal through the fault of God. If they miss it, it is our cooperation that has made them fail. Both the Old and the New Testaments abound with examples in testimony of this truth. A sufficient grace is given to arrive at sanctity, as is shown by this response of Our Lord to Saint Paul: "My grace is sufficient." Let us then be convinced that God gives to His ministers the necessary means for the requirements and the greatness of their vocation. These means may be commonly called the exercises of piety, or yet doctrine and piety, or the wise: "Ora et labora". The exercises of piety are not sanctity itself, but they are an indispensable condition for a holy life: it is proven by the authority and by experience.

Our Lord, teaching His apostles, enjoined them to watch and pray. Saint Paul, writing to his disciple Timothy, exhorted him to excel in the exercises of piety. The Holy Fathers have but one voice for exhorting the ministers of

Our Lord to attend to the exercises of piety. The Church echoes their teaching, when, in speaking of the holiness of ecclesiastics in general, She prescribes as a means to achieve it a certain number of exercises of piety, namely: the daily meditation, the Holy Mass, the breviary, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the reading of pious books, above all the divinely inspired books and the necessity to live from them, the examination of conscience, confession, retreats, community life and the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. To these we may add the practical counsels given by the popes, according to the epoch, to render these exercises of piety easier.

Nourishment for the soul

Experience has shown it to us. Our nature is feeble, naturally inclined towards evil. The exercises of piety are for the soul that which food is to the body, or yet, that which armour is for the soldier. From the time that we neglect them, the faith languishes, the opinions of the Christian truths become weakened, our hearts are made lukewarm and become frozen, because we have neglected the food which must maintain in us the doctrine and the piety.

What is more, we have some very difficult virtues to practice, some numerous and burdensome duties of state; these require effort, constancy and renouncement. Left to ourselves, we would not have the will, the energy, and the necessary perseverance. But with the exercises of piety we shall arrive at the end, because they unceasingly place before our eyes our obligations and the reasons that we have for being faithful to them, because they reawaken every day our good will and they revive our resolutions, and finally because they obtain for us the grace of faithfulness and of perseverance. In conclusion, let us say with the spiritual authors that the exercises of piety are like the oil that maintains the unction of piety, the live coals that light up the hearth of charity, and the canal that brings to the soul the waters of divine grace.

Quite far from us is the claim to have exhausted, through this modest article, the mystery of the priesthood. Let us humbly thank Our Lord for having shown us the priestly ideal by the nature and the obligations of priestly sanctity, of having placed at our disposal, by His grace, the infallible means to obtain this sanctity.

A Model to Priests

John XXIII, in his encyclical, Sacerdotii nostri primordia, of July 31st, 1959, takes the opportunity of the Centenary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars to speak of the priesthood and to accentuate, in the light of his death, certain aspects of the priestly life which are of great importance, especially in our times.

Fifty years later, on this past June 16th, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI promulgated a letter to all the priests of the world, in which he explained why he had chosen the Holy Curé of Ars as a model for the priests and as the patron of the Year of the Priesthood, which he would start on the feast of the Sacred Heart.

Thus, these two popes lie within the continuity of Saint Pius X and of Pius XI in proposing Saint John Mary Vianney as model, patron and intercessor to the priests of the entire world. All of them consider the meditation on his life and the application of his words and his examples as necessary and profitable in the life of every sincere priest desiring to conform himself to Christ.

Fr. Romain Pons

Something that is great

"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus", the saintly Curé of Ars would often say. This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. Here the teaching and example of Saint John Mary Vianney can serve as a significant point of reference for us all. The Curé of Ars was very humble, yet as a priest he was conscious of being an immense gift to his people: "A good shepherd, a pastor after God's heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy". He spoke of the priesthood as if incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the gift and task entrusted to a human creature: "O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...". Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: "Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who

feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest... After God, the priest is everything! ... Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is". These words, welling up from the priestly heart of the holy pastor, might sound excessive. Yet they reveal the high esteem in which he held the sacrament of the priesthood. He seemed overwhelmed by a boundless sense of responsibility: "Were we to fully realize what a priest is on earth, we would die: not of fright, but of love... Without the priest, the passion and death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption on earth... What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of his goods ... Leave a parish for twenty years without a priest, and they will end by worshipping the beasts there ... The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you". (Benedict XVI)

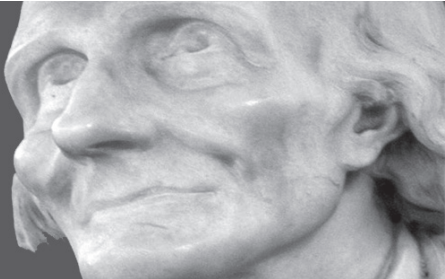
Man of prayer

The Holy Curé of Ars above all taught his parishioners through his example, by the good conduct of his life. "The priest above all must be a man of prayer," he had said. Also, he kept a constant union with God amidst his excessively occupied life. He could talk forever about the joys and the benefits of prayer: "Man is a pauper who has need of asking everything from God... What a lot of souls could we convert through our prayers!" Through his words and example, the faithful learned to pray, to voluntarily stop in front of the tabernacle to pay a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. "One does not have to speak much in order to pray – the Curé explained to them – One knows that the Good God is there, in the holy Tabernacle; one opens his heart to Him; one delights in His presence. That there – is the best prayer." And he exhorted them: "Come to Communion, come to Jesus, come to live of Him, in order to live for Him," "It is true, you are not worthy of it, but you have need of it!" This education of the faithful in the Real Presence and in Communion took on an exceptional effectiveness when the faithful saw him celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Those who would assist thereat would say: "How could anyone have a face that expresses such adoration... He contemplates the Host with so much love." "All the good works combined – he would say – are not equivalent to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of man and the Holy Mass is the work of God." He was convinced that all the fervor of the life of the priest depends upon the Mass: "The reason for the laxity of the priest is that he is not careful about the Mass! Alas! My God! How a priest deserves sympathy when he does it like something ordinary!" And he had the custom, when he celebrated, to always offer the sacrifice of his own life: "Oh! How good it is for a priest to offer himself every morning in sacrifice to God."

Confessional besieged

This personal identification with the sacrifice of the Cross conducted him – by one sole interior movement – from the altar to the confessional. "The priest must always be ready to answer to the needs of souls." (Benedict XVI) All his life was, effectively directed, turned towards souls. The main thing in the life of the Curé of Ars was the confessional: for thirty years, a torrent of unceasingly renewed pilgrims flooded towards the

church and the confessional of Ars: It was said in those days that Ars had become a great hospital for souls. "The great miracle of the holy Curé," they would say, "is his besieged confessional night and day." What truly filled him with joy was the return of souls to God. It was definitely his zeal for the salvation of so many sinful souls "that made him embrace throughout his long life a grueling ministry, without interruption, without attentions, without mellowing in any way, that made himself rise at midnight or one o'clock in the morning and leave the church very late, that condemned him to an almost total privation of sleep, and that, however, maintained in him an unaltered patience in the midst of the most annoying importunities." (Testimony at the process of beatification)



*Were we to fully realize
what a priest is on earth,
we would die:
not of fright, but of love!*

"The Curé of Ars had a different manner of conducting himself with the varied penitents. Those who approached his confessional, drawn by an interior and humble need of the pardon of God, found in him the encouragement to plunge themselves into 'the torrent of the divine mercy' which washes away everything in its tide. And if someone was afflicted by his weakness and his inconstancy, fearing to relapse in the future, the Curé revealed to him the secret of God through an expression of touching beauty: "The Good God knows all things. In advance He knows that after you have confessed you will sin again, and nevertheless He pardons you. What love as that of our God who goes so far as to forget the future in order to forgive us!" (Benedict XVI) But there was something more irresistible than words for the tepid and the hardened: it was tears. It sufficed for him sometimes, in order to soften a hardened heart, to tearfully show the crucifix hanging on the wall: "I cry for that which you do not cry", he said. "Even then, if the Good God was not so good, but He is so good. Must men be so barbarous for such a good Father?"

The one sent from God

His preaching was very simple, but so filled with the love of God that no one would weary from listening to it, be it in the daily catechisms at 11 o'clock or the Sunday preaching. "One would not listen to him like he listens to an ordinary preacher, but as one sent from God, a new John the Baptist who knows something of the secrets of above. (...) His words were full of eternity. His fiery gaze fixed sometimes on one, sometimes on another of his listeners, as if he had wanted to thrust the sword of his words all the way into their heart; he would lash the vice, he would curse the sin or more often, he would sing the beauties and the joys of the love of God." (Mons. Trochu) "This humble priest had, indeed, understood to an exceptional degree the dignity and the greatness of the ministry of the Word of God: 'Our Lord who is Truth itself', he would say, 'did not attach less importance to His Word than to His Body.'" (Sacerdotii nostri primordia)

Above all, Fr. Vianney urged souls to frequent the sacraments: "Not all those who approach them are saints, but the saints will be always taken from those who often receive them." Thus he was one of the first promoters of frequent Communion in a France that was still so influenced by Jansenism and Rigorism.

Privations

The consciousness that he had of his greatness, completely ordained to God and to the bestowing of His heavenly gifts, would then press the Curé of Ars, and normally all priests after him, to copy their life on this divine predilection. From there comes this asceticism which was in many respects more admirable than imitable: "To speak of St. John Mary Vianney, is to call to mind the figure of an exceptionally mortified priest who, for the love of God and the conversion of sinners, deprived himself of food and of sleep, imposed on himself harsh disciplines and above all practiced self-renouncement to a heroic degree (...) To everyone, the Curé of Ars' admirable example of renouncement, severe for himself and mild for others, recalls in an eloquent and insistent manner, the indispensable place of asceticism in the priestly life. (...) Convinced that the greatness of the priesthood is in the imitation of Jesus Christ, the priests, therefore, will be more than ever attentive to the calls

of the Divine Master: 'If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me'..." (Sacerdotii nostri primordia). "He himself kept a tight rein on his body, with vigils and fasts, lest it rebel against his priestly soul. Nor did he avoid self-mortification for the good of the souls in his care and as a help to expiating the many sins he heard in confession. To a priestly confrere he explained: 'I will tell you my recipe: I give sinners a small penance and the rest I do in their place'. Aside from the actual penances which the Curé of Ars practiced, the core of his teaching remains valid for each of us: souls have been won at the price of Jesus' own blood, and a priest cannot devote himself to their salvation if he refuses to share personally in the "precious cost" of redemption." (Benedict XVI)

Evangelical counsels

This ascetic physiognomy of our Holy Curé materialized in the practice of the three evangelical counsels, poverty, chastity and obedience, which, of course, are not imposed on the priest in accordance with his clerical state, but which are nevertheless the royal way of Christian sanctification.

St. John Mary Vianney is an admirable example of evangelical poverty: His poverty, in fact, was not that of a religious or of a monk, but that which is demanded of a priest: He "was rich for giving to others and very poor for himself." He explained: "My secret is really simple; it is of giving all and of keeping nothing." When he arrived there, having his hands empty, happily, he said to the poor who spoke to him: "I am poor like you; I am today one of yours." Thus, at the end of his life, he could affirm in total serenity: "I have nothing more; the Good God may call me when He wishes."

It was the Curé of Ars of whom Pius XI was thinking when writing to the priests: "Daily experience proves that a poor and disinterested evangelical priest certainly does miracles with the Christian people." (Divini Redemptoris) And again: "When we see men selling and buying everything with money, may they pass it exempt from all egoism, scorning all greediness; may they give of themselves to the pursuit of souls, not of money, to the glory of God, not of themselves." (Ad Catholici Sacerdotii)

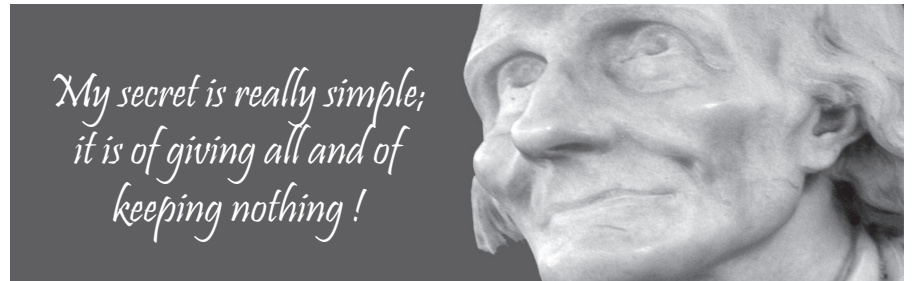
The look of love

His chastity was also that which is demanded of a priest for his ministry. We could say that he acted with the chastity necessary for one who habitually touches the Eucharist and who habitually contemplates it with all the ardour of his heart and who, with the same fervour, gives it to the faithful. It is said of him that "Chastity shone in his look," and the faithful became aware of this when he turned towards the tabernacle with the look of a lover." (Benedict XVI) This asceticism necessary for chastity, far from shutting the priest up in a sterile egoism, made his heart more open and more receptive to all the needs of his brothers: "When the heart is pure," the Curé of Ars said magnificently, "it cannot refrain from loving, because it has found the source of love, which is God." (Sacerdotii nostri primordia) To reach this source of Charity, the Holy Curé would use the mortification, and in an extraordinary manner: "His mortification had been constant, extreme, universal; it had taken up all of his life... The life of a trappist is nothing in comparison to his. I do not think that Christian penitence could be pursued further. The Curé of Ars has made us believe in the most extraordinary accounts in the history of the Fathers of the desert." (Testimony at the process of beatification) He never had enough penitence because he always wanted that his body and his soul would be more faithful instruments of Christ. His heart was without sin, and for forty years he fasted and scourged himself for sinners. But his greatest instrument of penitence was his confessional. Besides, in summer his confessional was an oven, and in winter, a freezer.

In the Church for the Church

"Likewise, the obedience of Saint John Mary Vianney was entirely personified in his adherence to all the sufferings united to the daily demands of the ministry. We know how much he was distressed by the thought of his incapacity for parish ministry and by his desire to flee "in order to weep in solitude over his poor life." Obedience alone, and his passion for souls, succeeded in convincing him to remain at his post. He proved to his faithful, as to himself, that "there are not two good ways to serve Our Lord, there is only one; it is to serve Him as He wills to be served." It seemed to him that the Golden Rule for a life of obedience was this: "Do not-

ing but that which may be offered to the Good God." (Benedict XVI) It was said of the Curé of Ars that he lived only in the Church and for the Church, like the blade of wheat lost in the furnace. Priests of Jesus Christ, we are plunged in this furnace that lights up the fire of the Holy Ghost; we have all received from the Church; we



act only in Her name and through the powers that She has conferred upon us: let us love to serve Her in the bonds of unity and in the manner in which She wants to be served". (Sacerdotii nostri primordia) And Pius XII: "the sanctity of the personal life and the efficacy of the apostolate have for their foundation and their support (...) the constant and exact obedience to the holy hierarchy".

Conclusion

We close this brief insight of the virtues of the Holy Curé of Ars by taking up again with our whole heart the wish by which pope John XXIII concluded his fine encyclical, that this hundred and fiftieth "anniversary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney may arouse, in the entire world, a renewal of fervour amongst the priests and amongst the youth called to the priesthood, and also from the part of all the faithful a greater and more active attention to the problems of the life and the ministry of priests.

May this Year of the Priesthood be the occasion for all to rekindle our Faith in the essential role of the Priesthood and to obtain that we always better see in the priest "God hidden like a light behind a window, as the wine mixed with the water." This is how it was explained by the Holy Curé of Ars.

The Sprouting of a Vocation

Saint John Bosco is often quoted to have said that one out of every three or four boys has a priestly vocation. It is greatly encouraging to know that God calls so many to the priesthood and even from each of our families. Many are called, few respond. What can be done to encourage our youth or any young man to answer the call to the priesthood? A little insight into what motivates a young man to become a priest might help us to do this. Your writer, a young priest, gives an account here of the pursuit of his own vocation. May this account serve as an insight into what has cultivated at least one and no doubt many vocations.

A newly ordained priest

Sprouting of a vocation

Applying the analogy of a seed we may consider the light by which it springs to life and grows. By this we can understand God who communicates his life to his creatures by the light of truth and out of the fire of his love. As a plant does not have eyes to see the light of the sun but yet grows on account of this light, so the soul does not see God but grows on account of his divine life. Now if a vocation is to reach towards the light of the life of God it must be exposed and sustained by this principle. This light is the knowledge of God, the Word of God Himself. He is made known and loved by the preaching and ministry of Holy Mother Church. Consequently a young boy or man whose heart holds the seedling of a vocation (whether he knows it or not) must be taught, instructed and nourished by Holy Mother Church in the truths of the faith. It is by the light and life of the faith that he will move towards the service of God.

The grace of a vocation has sprouted within your writer's soul especially on account of three lights: by the encouragement of priests, by the words and work of the Liturgy and by the Doctrines of the Faith. Holy Mass was finished. Father M., the parish priest, was carefully cleaning his chalice in the sacristy while your servant, a boy of thirteen years, was returning the candle snuffer to its place in a cupboard. Father broke the silence in a slightly serious tone of voice by saying:

"Hey ah, Timotheos,"

"Yes Father," came the ready reply.

"Did you ever think about becoming a priest?"

"Yes Father."

"Well ah, don't stop thinking about it."

"Yes Father." And so the conversation ended.

Father's double negative statement of "don't stop thinking about it" has been treasured ever since. The double negative form was interesting as it left the matter completely free of an obliging feeling while yet encouraging the idea. The thought of becoming a priest however, stayed far back in the boy's mind just the same. It was made manifest again a year or so later in an answer given to satisfy the curiosity of another questioner: "What do you plan to do after high school?" After a moment of reflection and not wanting to make any deliberation, the following statement was made: "Well, if God wants me to become a priest, I am not opposed."

Time to get serious

Three years later it was time to get serious about the matter. While visiting the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of

Guadalupe in Silver City, New Mexico, as a laborer, the young man was advised by the Father Prior to meditate on the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary: "behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." The meditation made was more or less as follows: "The Blessed Virgin Mary



followed God's will. I have to imitate her and follow God's will. He will make it known to me in time. Now if God wants me to become a priest I am not opposed. If he wants me to become a priest though, the next question must be: What are the proper reasons for someone to become a priest? It seems to me that only real reason to become a priest is for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." and so the meditation ended. A greater understanding of the glory of God and a zealous heart for the salvation of souls had yet to be cultivated. The motives would have to mature over time. There was however, another side to the matter. Was the dear boy ready to leave the things of the world to seek only the things of heaven? This involved a little more than logic. It meant offering oneself unreservedly to do the will of God. The disposition of his will had changed from, "I am not opposed," to, "if God wills, then I will." A firm oblation had to be made.

Need for priests

A few months later a senior priest of the Society of St. Pius X gave a conference on the new apostolate that was being carried out in Poland. He stressed the need for priests for the salvation of souls. This need touched the heart of the senior school boy. He could do something. He might not go to Poland but somehow an extra priest here or there could help to free another for Poland. The oblation was made. "If God wills that I become a priest, then I will it." A visit to the Blessed Sacrament most probably followed.

Not long after, the young aspirant was helping the Rector of the school he attended. The moment offered the Rector the opportunity to ask the boy what were his plans for the future. The following answer was made: "Well, I don't know if I should go to the seminary." Father's paternal reply was that it was a possibility to consider. A later visit to the Rector's office, for one reason or another, was an occasion for the Rector to encourage the idea. His words were very encouraging and left no impulse

of obligation. The matter was completely free. Father's words on this and other occasions were a source of future strength to the grace of the vocation. With such sure direction from his priests the seedling could easily reach towards the great light of the priesthood. An application to the seminary was soon filled and sent out.

Holy Mother Church had thus spoken through her priests to lead her son to the seminary. Her son's response was to do the will of God for his honor and glory and the salvation of souls. Holy Mother Church speaks and works through Her Liturgy

Drawn by the liturgy

In the year 1984 or 1985 at Saint Thomas Aquinas Seminary (at that time located just outside of Ridgefield, Connecticut) His Grace Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre was visiting to confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The Church building at the time was under construction. The floor was of plywood, the walls were roughly clad and something of a roof provided an edifice for the Liturgy. The beautiful Altar, His Grace, the sacred ministers, the priests, the servants, the schola, the seminarians and the faithful created the Liturgy. Your servant, at the time a child of five or six years, was told that he was in God's house, even though God couldn't be seen. The child wasn't told however, that God couldn't be heard. At different times during the ceremony a voice sounded forth. It was dignified and venerable. "Is that God?" the boy thought, he wanted to hear it more clearly. He strained to hear what was said and, not understanding, was disappointed when all was finished. "Maybe next time," he thought. And so it was that his mind, ear and heart were captivated by the Holy Liturgy. Many more Sundays would pass while the boy's wonder increased before the Holy Mysteries.

This captivation is not too surprising as it is primarily through the Sacred Liturgy that Holy Mother Church com-

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municates and cultivates the life of God in her children. She leads them to the Altar at least every Sunday. There they join themselves to the prayer of the Sacrifice. Those who are to be ordained Priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice will naturally be drawn to the priesthood through the Liturgy. This was the case of this child at six years of age as he followed in the footsteps of his older brother serving as a torchbearer and in learning the Latin responses to the prayers of the Mass. The prayers that were memorized found a place in his heart. As a deacon years later he would realize the significance of the rest of the Psalm. The singing of the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Creed, the Sanctus, of Vespers and of Compline will become habitual prayers by those who are drawn the singing of God's praises. It is natural to carry the chant and its prayer along with oneself for the rest of the day. These prayers, recited or sung, have struck many a chord in your writer's semi-attentive soul. Liturgical chant thus serves the life of the Church in her vital work of prayer. Its influence on priests, future priests and faithful cannot be ignored as prayer is the very breath of the soul.

Perfect honor and glory

At the core of the Liturgy are the Sacraments themselves. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the core and summit of the Liturgy. To offer it for the perfect honor and glory of God and for the salvation and sanctification of souls is the greatest motive that draws a young man to the priesthood. This brings to mind a crucial meeting once with the Seminary Rector. At one point he had to get down to business with your servant, his seminarian. For quite a few years it didn't seem that he was convinced that the boy had a vocation. He gently suggested that the door was open to leave more than a few times. "Dear boy, why do you want to become a priest?" he asked once directly and in a very serious tone of voice. The response given was equally serious, definite and deliberate. It was: "To offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." It must have had a good effect as the boy was not sent away from the seminary. The an-

swer impressed the boy as well as words of inspiration. Two or three years later the Rector was finally convinced of the boy's vocation and in another meeting spoke his mind with genuine words of encouragement.

Last, but not at all least to mention, is one great and vital light of the Liturgy that brings forth life for vocations. This is the example of good priests, religious and faithful, who know, love and live the liturgy, not simply for its beauty but first as the prayer of the Church for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. Their profound faith, hope and charity give life to the Church. Such was the example of His Grace Archbishop Lefebvre and now of many of his priestly sons and so many religious and faithful. The burning torch of the Faith is thus passed on through the ages inspiring vocations for the honor of God and the salvation of souls.

Doctrine

Were it not for the teaching of the realities of our Faith there would be no light by which the grace of a vocation may grow. The knowledge of God, of his love for his creatures and of redemption would simply not be known. Thus it is a primary work of Holy Mother Church to instruct her children to know, love and serve God. This is done especially by the teaching of the catechism, by sermons, by Catholic Schools and by the teaching of parents and even older siblings at home. These were the ordinary means by which your writer's vocation has been fostered.

There was a catalyst however, that synthesized and impressed the principle truths of the Faith on his soul. This was done by the preaching of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises twice attended during high school. Having completed the Exercises for a second time a new interest awoke. The desire was to understand and see the link of how the world of the Faith fit together with the world of natural reason and knowledge of philoso-

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phy, of the sciences, of mathematics and so on. The seedling of Faith had to deepen its roots in the understanding of the natural order so that greater lights could be understood and absorbed by its leaves in the supernatural order. The grace of the vocation was thus taking deeper root.

Being contemplative by temperament your writer naturally pondered the truths of the Faith and their importance during his mundane occupations and employments. One employment was to labor in the trade of stone and brick masonry. The labor was demanding and at times monotonous especially when helping to build something of simple utility. Thought of the eternal dimension of life filled the void of the occupation to aspire to a higher service.

Aspirations to higher service were certainly in order. "To whom much is given, much is expected." This saying was a call to responsibility. Having received a very good Catholic education, at least by modern standards, this responsibility was taken seriously but at times needed to be encouraged. This was done in a special way by a venerable older man, master craftsman of stone masonry. He worked, mostly on his own, beautifying the grounds of the school and parish with beautiful works made of stone. The detail of the work, the creation of something beautiful and enduring was found to be inspiring. The dear man would see his aspirant watching him at work. He would send the boy on his way pointing in the direction of the school, saying: "go study, you don't want to do this for the rest of your life." Not long before he died he was very glad to greet his former aspirant who was then wearing the cassock. He respectfully removed his hat from his head to the embarrassment of the former. He assured the young man that it was his great pleasure to do so. His example of faith and respect for the priesthood is now a further lesson for the responsibility to serve God well in the holy state of the priesthood.

Pivotal point

Having received so much of the light of the faith while so much of the world lives in darkness, it was natural to want to share it. A lively faith must bear fruit one way or another. Your servant was then at a pivotal point when others of the world started to ask questions concerning the Catholic Faith. There was a protestant Baptist, a well meaning man who asked what the principal truths of the Catholic Faith were. The answer that was given was a simple recitation and short explanation of the Apostles' Creed. This answer seemed to satisfy him. The next question touched on a particular Protestant difficulty. He asked: "How does a Catholic preacher know that he is sent to preach the word of God?" The need of authority to preach to others was a concern for him. The answer given was an explanation of the Church's teaching Authority. Also given was an explanation of the objective vocation which is the actual call of Holy Mother Church during the ceremony of ordination, to

which a candidate answers: "I am here." Other explanations were given as well. These answers made sense to him. There was nothing to argue about. A humble question was asked, and a humble answer was given. This was the second time that your servant was asked by a protestant for an explanation of the Faith. The first time was a year or so before with a question concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary, of how she is the Mother of God. It was a joy to explain the doctrines about our Blessed Mother. The ready answers to these questions above sparked a desire to help Protestants come to the light of the Faith. The grace of a vocation was budding. The years at the seminary are a huge introduction to the many mysteries and essential doctrines of the Faith. The Faith again, is the light by which the soul lives and grows in the life of God. With the light of Faith and the liturgical life shining so brightly at the Seminary, the seminarians have just to absorb it and grow.

Conclusion

What has been given here is a personal account of the pursuit of the grace of a vocation. It is one instance of many of the like, of the journey towards the priesthood. It is as a seed that springs to life and must grow seeking the light and warmth of the sun, the true knowledge and love of God. May it please God that many potential vocations may draw the light and example they need from all that we can do in living our Faith in its entirety close to the holy liturgy.



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| | | |
|--------------------|---|----------------|
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Seminary

Young men enter the seminary to follow their studies during at least six years. They receive the tonsure, four minor orders, and three major orders.

Priestly Ordination
see explanations page 15



Seminary:
Church of the international seminary of the Society St. Pius X in Ecône



Priestly duties and life:
The priest is ordained to say mass and to administer the sacraments. He accompanies the faithful at every moment of their life.



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