



CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

30 MAY 2008

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF PRIESTS

Reverend and dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

On the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus let us fix the eyes of our minds and hearts with a constant loving gaze on Christ, the one Saviour of our lives and of the world. Focusing on Christ means focusing on that Face which every human being, consciously or not, seeks as a satisfying response to his own insuppressible thirst for happiness.

We have encountered this Face and on that day, at that moment, his Love so deeply wounded our hearts that we could no longer refrain from asking ceaselessly to be in his Presence. “In the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch” (Ps 5).

The Sacred Liturgy leads us once again to contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, the origin and intimate reality of this company which is the Church: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob revealed himself in Jesus Christ. “No one could see his Glory unless first healed by the humility of his flesh.... By dust you were blinded, and by dust you are healed: flesh, then, had wounded you, flesh heals you“ (SAINT AUGUSTINE, Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Homily, 2, 16).

Only by looking again at the perfect and fascinating humanity of Jesus Christ — alive and active now — who revealed himself to us and still today bends down to each one of us with his special love of total predilection, can we let him illumine and fill the abyss of need which is our humanity, certain of Hope encountered and sure of Mercy that embraces our limitations and teaches us to forgive what we ourselves do not even manage to discern. “Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts” (Ps 42[41]).

On the occasion of the traditional World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests that is celebrated on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, I would like to recall the priority of prayer over action since it is on prayer that the effectiveness of action depends. The Church's mission largely depends on each person's personal relationship with the Lord Jesus and must therefore be nourished by prayer: “It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism” (BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, n. 37). Let us not tire of drawing on his Mercy, of letting him look at and medicate the painful wounds of our sin, in order to marvel at the ever new miracle of our redeemed humanity.

Dear confreres, we are experts of God's Mercy within us and only by so being, his instruments in embracing wounded humanity in a way that is ever new. “Christ does not save us from our humanity, but through it; he does not save us from the world but came into the world so that through him the world might be saved (cf. Jn 3:17)” (BENEDICT XVI, *Urbi et Orbi* Message, 25 December 2006). Finally, we are priests through the Sacrament of Orders, the highest Act of God's Mercy and, at the same time, of his special preference.

In the second place, with an unquenchable thirst and longing for Christ, the most authentic

dimension of our Priesthood is mendicancy, simple and continuous prayer that is learned in silent orison. It has always characterized the life of Saints and should be asked for insistently. This awareness of our relationship with him is subjected to the purification of daily testing. Every day we realize again and again that not even we Ministers who act in *Persona Christi Capitis* are spared this drama. We cannot live a single moment in his Presence without a gentle longing to know him and to continue to adhere to him. Let us not give in to the temptation to see being priests as a burden, inevitable and impossible to delegate, henceforth assumed, which can perhaps be carried out “mechanically” with a structured and coherent pastoral programme. Priesthood is the vocation, the path and the manner through which Christ saves us, has called us and is calling us now to abide with him.

The one adequate measure, with regard to our Holy Vocation, is radicalism. This total dedication with awareness of our infidelity can only be brought into being as a renewed and prayerful decision which Christ subsequently implements, day after day. The actual gift of priestly celibacy must be accepted and lived in this dimension of radicalism and full configuration to Christ. Any other approach to the reality of the relationship with him risks becoming ideological.

Even the great mass of work that the contemporary conditions of the ministry sometimes impose on us, far from discouraging us must spur us to care with even greater attention for our priestly identity which has an incontrovertibly divine root. In this regard the particular conditions of the ministry themselves must impel us, with a logic opposed to that of the world, to “raise the tone” of our spiritual life, witnessing with greater conviction and effectiveness to our exclusive belonging to the Lord.

We are taught total dedication by the One who loved us first. “I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I’ to a nation that did not call on my name”. The place of totality par excellence is the Eucharist since, “in the Eucharist Jesus does not give us a ‘thing’ but himself; he offers his own body and pours out his own blood” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 7).

Let us be faithful, dear confreres, to the daily Celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist, not solely in order to fulfil a pastoral commitment or a requirement of the community entrusted to us but because of the absolute personal need we have of it, as of breathing, as of light for our life, as the one satisfactory reason for a complete priestly existence.

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the Holy Father repropose to us forcefully St Augustine's affirmation: “no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it” (*SAINTE AUGUSTINE, Enarrationes in Psalmos 98,9*). We cannot live, we cannot look at the truth about ourselves without letting ourselves be looked at and generated by Christ in daily Eucharistic Adoration, and the “Stabat” of Mary, “Woman of the Eucharist”, beneath her Son's Cross, is the most significant example of contemplation and adoration of the divine Sacrifice that has been given to us.

Since the missionary spirit is intrinsic in the very nature of the Church, our mission is likewise innate in the priestly identity, which is why missionary urgency is a matter of self-awareness. Our priestly identity is edified and renewed day after day in “conversation” with Our Lord. An immediate consequence of our relationship with him, ever nourished in constant prayer, is the need to share it with all those around us. The holiness we ask for daily, in fact, cannot be conceived according to a sterile and abstract individual acceptance but is necessarily Christ's holiness, which is contagious for everyone: “Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his ‘being for all’; it makes it our own way of being” (*BENEDICT XVI, Spe Salvi*, n. 28).

Christ's “being for all” is realized for us in the *Tria Munera* by which we are clothed in the very nature of the Priesthood. These *Munera* which constitute the entirety of our Ministry, are not the place for alienation or, even worse, a mere functionalist reductionism of ourselves but rather are the truest expression of our belonging to Christ; they are the place of our relationship with him. The People which has been entrusted to us to be educated, sanctified and governed is not a reality that distracts us from “our life” but the Face of Christ that we contemplate daily, as the face of his beloved for the bridegroom and the Church his Bride for Christ. The People entrusted to us is the indispensable path

for our holiness, in other words the path on which Christ manifests through us the Glory of the Father.

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea... those on the other hand who send to perdition an entire people... what should they suffer and what punishment should they receive?” (SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Sacerdotio* VI, 1.498). In the face of the awareness of such a serious task and such a great responsibility for our life and our salvation, in which faithfulness to Christ coincides with “obedience” to the needs dictated by the redemption of those souls, there is not even room to doubt the grace received. We can only ask to surrender as much as possible to his Love so that he will act through us, for either we let Christ save the world, acting in us, or we risk betraying the very nature of our vocation. The measure of dedication, dear confreres, is totality, again and anew. Yes, “five loaves and two fishes” are not many but they are all! God's Grace makes of all our littleness the Communion that satisfies the People. Elderly and sick priests who exercise the divine ministry daily, uniting themselves with Christ's Passion and offering their own priestly existence for the true good of the Church and the salvation of souls, share especially in this “total dedication”.

Lastly, the Holy Mother of God remains an indispensable foundation of the whole of priestly life. The relationship with her cannot be resolved in pious devotional practice but is nourished by ceaseless entrustment to the arms of the ever Virgin of the whole of our life, of our ministry in its entirety. Mary Most Holy also leads us, like John, to beneath the Cross of her Son and Our Lord in order to contemplate, with her, God's infinite Love: “He who for us is Life itself descended here and endured our death and slew it by the abundance of his Life” (SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones* IV, 12).

As a condition for our redemption, for the fulfilment of our humanity, for the Advent of the Incarnation of the Son, God the Father chose to await a Virgin's “Fiat” to an angel's announcement. Christ decided to entrust, so to speak, his own Life to the loving freedom of the Mother: “She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the Cross. Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 61).

Pope St Pius X said: “Every priestly vocation comes from the heart of God but passes through the heart of a mother”. This is true with regard to obvious biological motherhood but it is also true of the “birth” of every form of fidelity to the Vocation of Christ. We cannot do without a spiritual motherhood for our priestly life: let us entrust ourselves confidently to the prayer of the whole of Holy Mother Church, to the motherhood of the People, whose pastors we are but to whom are entrusted our custody and holiness; let us ask for this fundamental support.

Dear confreres, the urgent need for “a movement of prayer, placing 24-hour continuous Eucharistic adoration at the centre so that a prayer of adoration, thanksgiving, praise, petition and reparation will be raised to God, incessantly and from every corner of the earth, with the primary intention of awakening a sufficient number of holy vocations to the priestly state and, at the same time, spiritually uniting with a certain spiritual maternity — at the level of the Mystical Body — all those who have already been called to the ministerial priesthood and are ontologically conformed to the one High and Eternal Priest. This movement will offer better service to Christ and his brothers — those who are at once ‘inside’ the Church and also ‘at the forefront’ of the Church, standing in Christ's stead (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 16), and representing him as head, shepherd and spouse of the Church” (*Letter of the Congregation of the Clergy*, 8 December 2007).

A further form of spiritual motherhood has recently been outlined. It has always silently accompanied the chosen ranks of priests in the course of the Church's history. It is the concrete entrustment of our ministry to a specific face, to a consecrated soul who has been called by Christ and therefore chooses to offer herself, with the necessary suffering and the inevitable struggles of life, to intercede for our priestly existence, thereby dwelling in Christ's sweet presence.

This motherhood, which embodies Mary's loving face, should be prayed for because God alone can bring it into being and sustain it. In this regard there are plenty of wonderful examples; only think

of St Monica's beneficial tears for her son Augustine, for whom she wept “more than mothers weep when lamenting their dead children” (SAINT AUGUSTINE, Confessions III, 11).

Another fascinating example is that of Eliza Vaughan, who gave birth to 13 children and entrusted them to the Lord; six of her eight sons became priests and four of her five daughters became women religious. Since it is impossible to be true mendicants before Christ, marvellously concealed in the Eucharistic Mystery, without being able in practice to ask for the effective help and prayers of those whom he sets beside us, let us not be afraid to entrust ourselves to the motherhoods that the Spirit will certainly bring into being for us.

St Thérèse of the Child Jesus, aware of the extreme need of prayer for all priests, especially those who were lukewarm, wrote in a letter to her sister Céline, “Let us live for souls, let us be apostles, let us save above all the souls of priests.... Let us pray and suffer for them and on the last day Jesus will be grateful” (SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, Letter 94).

Let us entrust ourselves to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Queen of Apostles, our sweetest Mother, let us look to Christ with her, ceaselessly striving to be totally, radically his; this is our identity!

Let us remember the words of the Holy Curée d’Ars, Patron of Parish Priests: “If I already had one foot in Heaven and I was told to return to the earth to work to convert sinners, I would gladly return. And if, to do this, it were necessary that I remain on earth until the end of the world, always rising at midnight and suffering as I suffer, I would consent with all my heart” (BROTHER ATHANASE, Procès de l’Ordinaire, p. 883).

May the Lord guide and protect each and every one, especially the sick and those who are suffering the most, in the constant offering of our life for love.



Cardinal Cláudio Hummes
Prefect



✠ Mauro Piacenza
Titular Archbishop of Victoriana
Secretary

PRAYERS OF PRIESTS

Priestly Prayer

Lord, You have called me to priestly ministry
in a particular moment of history,
as in the times of the first Apostles,
when You desire that all Christians,
and in a particular way Your priests,
might be witnesses to the wonders of God
and the strength of Your Spirit.

Allow me to be a witness to the dignity of human life,
to the grandeur of love,
and to the power of the ministry which I have received.
May my entire life be dedicated to You:
for love, only for love, and for a higher love.

May my commitment to celibacy
born of Your mission,
be a joyful and happy affirmation
and a total dedication of myself to others
in the service of Your Church.
Give me strength in my weakness,
and gratitude for my steadfastness.

Holy Mother Mary,
greatest and most wonderful mother of all time,
grant that I may entrust my life to you each day.
Mary, font of generosity and dedication,
grant that I may be joined with you
at the foot of the greatest crosses of the world,
experiencing the redeeming pain of the death of your Son,
so that I might enjoy the triumph of the Resurrection
for eternal life. Amen

A prayer priests might say on a daily basis

Almighty God, we pray that your grace may assist us in the ministerial priesthood to serve you worthily and devoutly, in complete purity, and in good conscience. And if we are unable to live our lives with such innocence, grant that we weep bitterly over the evil we have done. Grant that we may serve you ever fervently with a spirit of humility, with right intention of good will. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Invocation

O good Jesus, make me a priest after your own Heart.

Prayer to Jesus Christ

Most beloved Jesus, with a singular benevolence you have called me from among thousands of men to follow you in the excellence of priestly dignity. I beg you for the divine strength to rightly fulfil my ministry. I implore you, Lord Jesus, to daily renew the grace given to me through the imposition of the hands of the Bishop. O most powerful doctor of souls, heal me so that I may not fall back into evil, that I may flee from every sin, and that I may do what is pleasing in your eyes until the hour of my death. Amen.

Prayer to implore the grace to safeguard chastity

Lord Jesus Christ, spouse of my soul, delight of my heart and my soul, I fall on my knees before you, praying and fervently beseeching you to allow me to persevere and grow in the true faith each day. O sweet Jesus, grant that I may reject all impiety and that I may be a stranger to the carnal desires and earthly concupiscence which fight against my soul. Through your help, may I preserve my chastity unstained.

O most holy and immaculate Virgin Mary, Virgin of virgins and most beloved Mother, purify my heart and soul each day, and obtain for me a holy fear of the Lord and a particular distrust of my own strength.

St. Joseph, guardian of the virginity of Mary, keep my soul from all sin.

All of you holy Virgins who unceasingly follow the divine Lamb, be solicitous to me a sinner, that I may avoid sin in thoughts, words, actions or omissions, and that I may never be far from the most chaste heart of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer for Priests

Lord Jesus, present in the Most Blessed Sacrament,
and living perpetually among us through Your Priests,
grant that the words of Your Priests may be only Your words,
that their gestures be only Your gestures,
and that their lives be a true reflection of Your life.

Grant that they may be men who speak to God on behalf of His people,
and speak to His people of God.

Grant that they be courageous in service,
serving the Church as she asks to be served.

Grant that they may be men who witness to eternity in our time,
travelling on the paths of history in Your steps,
and doing good for all.

Grant that they may be faithful to their commitments,
zealous in their vocation and mission,
clear mirrors of their own identity,
and living the joy of the gift they have received.

We pray that Your Holy Mother, Mary,
present throughout Your life,
may be ever present in the life of Your Priests. Amen