

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

This Month's reading:

Saint Pius X

Dear Father,

The text you are about to read belongs to the Apostolic Exhortation *Haerent Animo*, written by Pope Saint Pius X in 1902. This Exhortation, which the Holy Father addressed to the Catholic clergy on the occasion of the Golden jubilee of his priesthood, was written entirety in his own hand in the space of some weeks. It is a document which truly comes from the heart of the Pontiff. In it he presents his ideal of the priesthood, and reveals the serious anxieties

which he experienced at a time when the modernist crisis was still a source of perturbation to the clergy.

Saint Pius X was fond of recommending this Exhortation to the members of the episcopate: “This document, in which we opened our heart to all sacred ministers, make it your business to recall it and explain it for the benefit of the clerics for whom you are responsible. Besides, realize thoroughly and hold fast to this truth: when you have a body of clergy who conform to the ideal outlined in that Exhortation, you

will certainly find your pastoral care greatly lightened, and the fruits of your apostolate will be much more abundant.” (Letter to the episcopate of Brazil, 18 December 1910)

May the Good Lord help us to follow these teachings!

Fr. Tomás Ravaioli, IVE
LCI Director

Author: Saint Pius X

Saint Pius X (Giuseppe Sarto) was born in 1835 to a poor but faithful family in Italy. He never understood the importance that was placed on money. He was very content with what he already had and didn't want anything more. Giuseppe placed great value on his relationship with God. He held the belief that as long as he had his faith and the love of God, he had everything that he needed.

Giuseppe's devotion to his faith led him to pursue a career as a priest. He was ordained in 1858 and was considered to be a good and kind priest. His selfless nature and modesty earned him a great deal of positive attention. He worked with the sick and the poor and was involved in religious education of young people, especially those whose families could not afford to send them to church schools.

In 1903 Giuseppe was elected pope. He took the name Pius X. As pope, Pius began to share his belief in the importance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He always felt that going to communion often was one of the ways a person could be closest to God. Pius strongly felt that the younger a person could receive his or her First Communion, the better. Pius enacted a law that made the age of a person's First Communion to be around seven years. He also collected all of the laws of the church into one book, which is called the Code of Canon Law.



Pius was pope for 11 years and is remembered with much love and fondness. He taught weekly catechism classes in a Vatican courtyard with children included. People who met him often said they felt they had met a saint, and it was said that several miracles credited to him occurred while he was still living. He will always be remembered for his simplicity and poverty.

Before he died in 1914, Pius was heard to say, "I was born poor and I will die poor." His canonization took place in 1954, just 40 years after his death.

From the Apostolic Exhortation *Haerent Animo* addressed to the Catholic Clergy

By Saint Pius X

Our first and chief concern is that all who are invested with the priestly ministry should be in every way fitted for the discharge of their responsibilities. For we are fully convinced that it is here that hope lies for the welfare and progress of religious life.

But though it is a matter for congratulation that, as a result of the diligence of the bishops, so many priests are animated by heavenly fervor to rekindle or strengthen in their souls the flame of divine grace which they received by the imposition of hands, we must deplore the fact that there are others in different countries who do not show themselves worthy to be taken as models by the christian people who rightly look to them for a genuine model of christian virtue.

It is to these priests that we wish to open our heart in this Letter; it is a father's loving heart which beats anxiously as he looks upon an ailing child. Our love for them inspires us to add our own appeal to the appeals of their own bishops.

And while our appeal is intended above all to recall the erring to the right path and to spur the lukewarm to fresh endeavor, we would wish it to serve as an encouragement to others also. We point out the path which each one must strive to follow with constantly growing fervor, so that he may become truly a man of God, as the Apostle so concisely expresses it, and fulfill the legitimate expectations of the Church.

We have nothing to say which you have not already heard, no doctrine to propound that is new to anyone; but we treat of matters which it is necessary for everyone to bear in mind, and God inspires us with the hope that our message will not fail to bear abundant fruit.

In this exhortation, it is not your personal welfare alone that we are striving to secure, but the common welfare of catholic peoples; the one cannot be separated from the other. For the priest cannot be good or bad for himself alone; his conduct and way of life have far-reaching consequences for

the people. A truly good priest is an immense gift wherever he may be.

I - THE OBLIGATION OF PRIESTLY SANCTITY

Therefore, beloved sons, we will begin this exhortation by stimulating you to that sanctity of life which the dignity of your office demands.

Anyone who exercises the priestly ministry exercises it not for himself alone, but for others. *For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in the things that pertain to God.*

(Heb 5.1) Christ himself taught that lesson when he compared the priest to salt and to light, in order to show the nature of the priestly ministry. The priest then is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Everyone knows that he fulfills this function chiefly by the teaching of christian truth; and who can be unaware that this ministry of teaching is practically useless if the priest fails to confirm by the example of his life the truths which he teaches? Those who hear him might say, insultingly it is true, but not without justification: *They profess that they know God but in their works they deny him* (Tit 1:16), they will refuse to accept his teaching

and will derive no benefit from the light of the priest.

Christ himself, the model of priests, taught first by the example of his deeds and then by his words: *Jesus began to do and then to teach.* (Acts 1:1)

Likewise, a priest who neglects his own sanctification can never be the salt of the earth; what is corrupt and contaminated is utterly incapable of preserving from corruption; where sanctity is lacking, there corruption will inevitably find its way. Hence Christ, continuing this comparison, calls such priests salt that has lost its savor, which is good for nothing any more, but to be cast out and to be trodden on by men.

These truths are all the more evident inasmuch as we exercise the priestly ministry not in our own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostle said: *Let man so consider us as the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God* (1 Cor 4:1); *for Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors.* (1 Cor 5:20) This is the reason that Christ has numbered us not among his servants but as his friends. *"I will not now call you servants... but I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard from my Father I have made known to you... I have chosen you and*

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We have, therefore, to take the place of Christ: the mission which he has given to us we must fulfill with that same purpose that he intended. True friendship consists in unity of mind and will, identity of likes and dislikes; therefore, as friends of Jesus Christ, we are bound to have that mind in us which was in Jesus Christ who is *holy, innocent, undefiled.* (Heb 7:26) As his envoys, we must win the minds of men for his doctrine and his law by first observing them ourselves; sharing as we do in his power to deliver souls from the bondage of sin, we must strive by every means to avoid becoming entangled in these toils of sin.

But it is particularly as the ministers of Jesus Christ in the great sacrifice which is constantly renewed with abiding power for the salvation of the world, that we have the duty of conforming our minds to that spirit in which he offered himself as an unspotted victim to God on the altar of the Cross. In the Old Law, though victims were only shadowy figures and symbols, sanctity of a high degree was demanded of the priest; what then of us, now that the victim is Christ himself? “How pure should not he be who shares in this sacrifice! More resplendent than the sun must be the

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hand that divides this Flesh, the mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by this Blood!” (St. John Chrysostom)

Saint Charles Borromeo gave apt expression to this thought when, in his discourses to the

clergy, he declared: “If we would only bear in mind, dearly beloved brethren, the exalted character of the things that the Lord God has placed in our hands, what unbounded influence would not this have in impelling us to lead lives worthy of ecclesiastics! Has not the Lord placed everything in my hand, when he put there his only-begotten Son, coeternal and coequal with himself? In my hand he has placed all his treasures, his sacraments, his graces; he has placed there souls, than whom nothing can be dearer to him; in his love he has preferred them to himself, and redeemed them by his Blood; he has placed heaven in my hand, and it is in my power to open and close it to others... How, then, can I be so ungrateful for such condescension and love as to sin against him, to offend his honor, to pollute this body which is his? How can I come to defile this high dignity, this life consecrated to his service?”

When we were first enrolled in the army of the Church, she sought from us the formal declaration: *The Lord is the*

portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me. (Ps. 15:5) St. Jerome tells us that with these words “the cleric is reminded that one who is the portion of the Lord, or who has the Lord as his portion, must show himself to be such a one as possesses the Lord and is possessed by him.”

How solemnly the Church addresses those who are about to be promoted sub-deacons! “You must consider repeatedly and with all attention the office which of your own volition you seek today... if you receive this Order, you cannot afterwards revoke your decision, you must remain always in the service of God and, with his help, observe chastity.” And finally: “If up to now you have been negligent in relation to the Church, henceforth you must be diligent; if hitherto you have been somnolent, henceforth you must be vigilant... if up to now your life has been unseemly, henceforth you must be chaste; ... Consider the ministry which is entrusted to you!” For those who are about to be raised to the diaconate, the Church prays to God through the mouth of the bishop: “May they have in abundance the pattern of every

virtue, authority that is unassuming, constancy in chastity, the purity of innocence, and the observance of spiritual discipline. May thy commands shine forth through their conduct, and may the people find a saintly model in their exemplary chastity.”

The admonition addressed to those who are about to be ordained priests is even more moving: “It is with great fear that one must approach this high dignity, and care must be taken that those chosen for it are recommended by heavenly wisdom, blameless life and sustained observance of justice ... Let the fragrance of your life be a joy to the Church of Christ, so that by your preaching and example you may build up the house, that is, the family of God.” Above all the Church stresses the solemn words: Imitate

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that which you handle, an injunction which fully agrees with the command of St. Paul: *That we may present every man perfect in Jesus Christ.* (Col 1:28)

Since this is the mind of the Church on the life of a priest, one cannot be surprised at the complete unanimity of the Fathers and Doctors on this matter; it might indeed be thought that they are guilty of exaggeration, but a careful

examination will lead to the conclusion that they taught nothing that was not entirely true and correct. Their teaching can be summarized thus: there should be as much difference between the priest and any other upright man as there is between heaven and earth; consequently, the priest must see to it that his life is free not merely from grave faults but even from the slightest faults. The Council of Trent made the teaching of these venerable men its own when it warned clerics to avoid "even venial faults which in their case would be very grave. These faults are grave, not in themselves, but in relation to the one who commits them; for to him, even

If holiness is wanting in the priest, then everything is wanting.

more than to the sacred edifice, are applicable the words: Holiness becometh thy house.

II - NATURE OF PRIESTLY HOLINESS

We must now consider what is the nature of this sanctity, which the priest cannot lack without being culpable; ignorance or misunderstanding of it leaves one exposed to grave peril.

There are some who think, and even declare openly, that the true measure of the merits of a priest is his dedication to the service of others; consequently, with an almost complete disregard for the cultivation of the virtues which lead to the personal sanctification of



the priest (these they describe as passive virtues), they assert that all his energies and fervor should be directed to the development and practice of what they call the active virtues. One can only be astonished by this gravely erroneous and pernicious teaching.

Our predecessor of happy memory in his wisdom spoke as follows of this teaching: "To maintain that some christian virtues are more suited to one period than to

another is to forget the words of the Apostle:

Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Rom 8:29)

Christ is the teacher and the model of all sanctity; all who desire to take their place in the abode of the blessed must adapt their conduct to the standard which he has laid down. Now Christ does not change with the passing of the centuries:

He is the same yesterday and to-day and forever. (Heb 13:8)

The words: "*Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart*", (Mt 11:29) apply to men of every age; at all times Christ reveals himself *obedient unto death*; (Phil 2:8) true for every age are the words of the Apostle: *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the vices and concupiscences.*" (Gal 5:24)

"In my hand he has placed all his treasures, his sacraments, his graces; he has placed there souls, than whom nothing can be dearer to him"

(St. Charles Borromeo)

These passages apply, no doubt, to all the faithful, but they apply more especially to priests. Let priests take as directed particularly to themselves the further words which were spoken by our predecessor in his apostolic zeal: "Would that at the present day there were many more who cultivated these virtues as did the saints of former times, who by their humility, their obedience, their abstinence, were mighty in work

and word, to the great benefit not only of religion but also of public and civil life."

It is not irrelevant to note here that Leo XIII in his wisdom made special mention of the virtue of abstinence, which we call self-denial, in the words of the Gospel. He was quite right to do so, for it is from self-denial chiefly that the strength and power and fruit of every priestly function derive; it is when this

virtue is neglected that there appears in the priest's conduct whatever may be of a nature to cause offense to the eyes and hearts of the faithful. If one acts for the sake of filthy lucre, or becomes involved in worldly affairs, or seeks for the highest places and despises others, or follows merely human counsel, or seeks to please men, or trusts in the persuasive words

of human wisdom, this is the result of neglect of the command of Christ and of the refusal to accept the condition laid down by him: *"If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself"*. (Mt 16:24)

While insisting on these truths, we would likewise admonish the priest that in the last analysis, it is not for himself alone that he has to sanctify himself, for he is the workman whom Christ went out to hire into his vineyard. Therefore, it is his duty to uproot unfruitful plants and to sow useful ones, to water the crop and to guard lest the enemy sow cockle among it. Consequently, the priest must be careful not to allow an unbalanced concern for personal perfection to lead him to overlook any part of the duties of his office which are conducive to the welfare of others. These duties include the preaching of the word of God, the hearing of confessions, assisting the sick, especially the dying, the instruction of those who are ignorant of the faith, the consolation of the sorrowing, leading back the erring, in a word, the imitation in every respect of Christ who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.

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In the midst of all these duties, the priest shall have ever present to his mind the striking admonition given by St. Paul: *Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.* (1 Cor 3:7). It may be that we go and sow the seed with tears; it may be that we tend its growth at the cost of heavy labor; but to make it germinate and yield the hoped for fruit, that depends on God alone and his powerful assistance.

This further point also is worthy of profound consideration, namely that men are but the instruments whom God employs for the salvation of souls; they must, therefore, be instruments fit to be employed by God. And how is this to be achieved? Do we imagine that God is influenced by any inborn or acquired excellence of ours, to make use of our help for the extension of his glory? By no means; for it is written: *God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world God has chosen to confound the strong, and the humble and contemptible things of the world God has chosen, the things that are not, in order to bring to nought the things that are.* (1 Cor 1:27-28)

There is, indeed, only one thing that unites man to God, one thing that makes him pleasing to God and a not unworthy dispenser of his mercy; and that one thing is holiness of life and conduct. If this holiness, which is the true supereminent knowledge of Jesus Christ, is wanting in the priest, then everything is wanting. Without this, even the resources of profound learning (which we strive to promote among the clergy), or exceptional competence in practical affairs, though they may bring some benefit to the Church or to individuals, are not infrequently the cause of deplorable damage to them.

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence from every age that even the humblest priest, provided his life has the adornment of overflowing sanctity, can undertake and accomplish marvelous works for the spiritual welfare of the people of God; an outstanding example in recent times is John Baptist Vianney, a model pastor of souls, to whom we are

happy to have decreed the honors of the Blessed in heaven.

Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation demands, men crucified to the world and to whom the world has been crucified, men walking in newness of life who, in the words of St. Paul, show themselves as ministers of God in labors, in vigils, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere charity, in the word of truth;[38] men who seek only heavenly things and strive by every means to lead others to them.

III - MEANS OF ACQUIRING PRIESTLY SANCTITY

1- Prayer, an Essential Condition of Sanctity

Since, as everyone realizes, holiness of life is the fruit of the exercise of the will inasmuch as it is strengthened by the aid of divine grace, God has made abundant

provision lest we should at any time lack the gift of grace, if we desire it. We can obtain it, in the first place, by constant prayer.

There is, in fact, such a necessary link between holiness and prayer that the one cannot exist without the other.

The words of Chrysostom on this matter are an exact



expression of the truth: "I consider that it is obvious to everyone that it is impossible to live virtuously without the aid of prayer;" and Augustine sums up shrewdly: "He truly knows how to live rightly, who rightly knows how to pray."

Christ himself, by his constant exhortations and especially by his example, has even more firmly inculcated these truths. To pray he withdrew into desert places or climbed the mountain alone; he spent whole nights absorbed in prayer; he paid many visits to the temple; even when the crowds thronged around him, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed openly before them; when nailed to the Cross, in the agony of death, he supplicated the Father with a strong cry and tears.

Let us be convinced, therefore, that a priest must be specially devoted to the practice of prayer if he is to maintain worthily his dignity and to fulfill his duty. All too frequently one must deplore the fact that prayer is a matter of routine rather than of genuine fervor; the Psalms are recited at the appointed times in a negligent manner, a few short prayers are said in between; there is no further thought of consecrating part of the day to speaking with God, with pious aspirations to him.

And it is the priest, more than any other, who is bound to obey scrupulously the command of Christ: "*We ought always pray*", (Lk 18:1) a command which Paul so insistently inculcated: *Be instant in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving*; (Col 4:2) *pray without ceasing*. (1 Thess. 5:17)

2- *The Obligation of Daily Meditation*

A point of capital importance is that a certain time should be given daily to meditation on the eternal truths. No priest can neglect this practice without incurring a grave charge of negligence and without detriment to his soul. The

saintly abbot, Bernard, when writing to Eugene III, his former pupil who had become Roman Pontiff, frankly and emphatically admonished him never to omit daily divine meditation; he would not admit as an excusing cause even the many weighty cares which the supreme pontificate involves. In justification of this advice

he enumerated with great prudence the benefits of the practice of meditation: "Meditation purifies the source from which it comes, the mind. It controls affections, guides our acts, corrects

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excesses, rules our conduct, introduces order and dignity into our lives; it bestows understanding of things divine and human. It brings clarity where there is confusion, binds what is torn apart, gathers what is scattered, investigates what is hidden, seeks out the truth, weighs what has the appearance of truth, and shows up what is pretense and falsehood. It plans future action and reviews the past, so that nothing remains in the mind that has not been corrected or that stands in need of correction. When affairs are prospering it anticipates the onset of adversity, and when adversity comes it seems not to feel it, in this it displays in turn prudence and fortitude.”

This summary of the benefits which meditation is calculated to bring is an instructive reminder not only of its salutary effect in every department, but also of its absolute necessity.

Despite the high dignity of the various functions of the priestly office and the veneration which they deserve, frequent exercise of these functions may lead those who discharge them to treat them with less respect than is their due. From a gradual decline in fervor it is an easy step to carelessness and even to distaste

for the most sacred things. In addition, a priest cannot avoid daily contact with a corrupt society; frequently, in the very exercise of pastoral charity, he must fear the insidious attacks of the infernal serpent. Is it not all too easy even for religious souls to be tarnished by contact with the world?[46] It is evident, therefore, that there is a grave and urgent need for the priest to turn daily to the contemplation of the eternal truths, so that his mind and will may

gain new strength to stand firm against every enticement to evil.

Moreover, it is the strict duty of the priest to have a mind for heavenly things, to teach them, to inculcate them; in the regulation of his whole life he must be so much superior to human considerations that whatever he does in the discharge of his sacred office will be

done in accordance with God, under the impulse and guidance of faith; it is fitting then that he should possess a certain aptitude to rise above earthly considerations and strive for heavenly things. Nothing is more conducive to the acquisition and strengthening of this disposition of soul, this quasi-natural union with God, than daily meditation; it is unnecessary to dwell

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upon this truth which every prudent person clearly realizes.

The life of a priest who underestimates the value of meditation, or has lost all taste for it, provides a sad confirmation of what we have been saying. Let your eyes dwell on the spectacle of men in whom the mind of Christ, that supremely precious gift, has grown weak; their thoughts are all on earthly things, they are engaged in vain pursuits, their words are so much unimportant chatter; in the performance of their sacred functions they are careless, cold, perhaps even unworthy. Formerly, these same men, with the oil of priestly ordination still fresh upon them, diligently prepared themselves for the recitation of the Psalms, lest they should be like men who tempt God; they sought a time and place free from disturbance; they endeavored to grasp the divine meaning; in union with the psalmist they poured forth their soul in songs of praise, sorrow and rejoicing. But now, what a change has taken place!

Some of those who find recollection of the heart a burden, or entirely neglect it, do not seek to disguise the impoverishment of soul which results from their attitude, but they try to excuse themselves on the pretext that they are completely occupied by the activity of their ministry, to the manifold benefit of others.

They are gravely mistaken. For as they are unaccustomed to converse

with God, their words completely lack the inspiration which comes from God when they speak to men about God or inculcate the counsels of the christian life; it is as if the message of the Gospel were practically dead in them. However distinguished for prudence and eloquence, their speech does not echo the voice of the good Shepherd which the sheep hear to their spiritual profit; it is mere sound which goes forth without fruit, and sometimes gives a pernicious example to the disgrace of religion and the scandal of the good.

At this point we cannot refrain from referring with sorrow to those who, carried away by pernicious novelties, dare to maintain a contrary opinion, and to hold that time devoted to meditation and prayer is wasted. What calamitous blindness! Would that such people would take thought seriously with themselves and realize whither this neglect and contempt of prayer leads. From it have sprung pride and stubbornness; and these have produced those bitter fruits which in our paternal love we hesitate to mention and most earnestly desire to remove completely.

Beloved sons, may this our exhortation, which is none other than the exhortation of Christ our Lord: "*Be watchful, be vigilant and pray*", (Mk 13:33) be deeply engraven in their hearts and in yours. Let each one diligently apply himself above all to the practice of pious meditation; let him do so with sincere confidence,

constantly repeating the words: “*Lord teach us to pray.*” (Lk 11:1)

The pastoral address of St. Charles Borromeo is relevant here and is worth recalling: “Realize, my brethren, that nothing is so necessary to an ecclesiastic as mental prayer before, during and after all our actions. I will sing, said the prophet, and I will understand. If administering the sacraments, my brother, meditate on what you are doing; if celebrating Mass, ponder on what you are offering; in reciting the Psalms, reflect on what you are saying and to whom you are speaking; if directing souls, reflect on the Blood with which they were washed.”

3- Spiritual Reading

It is of great importance that the priest should combine his daily divine meditation with the constant reading of pious books, especially the inspired books. That was the command that Paul gave to Timothy: “*Attend unto reading.*” (1 Tim. 4:13) The same lesson was taught by St. Jerome when instructing Nepotianus on the priestly life: “Never let the sacred book leave your hands”; and he gave the following reason for his advice: “Learn that which you are to teach; holding to that faithful word which conforms to doctrine, that you may be able to exhort with sound doctrine, and refute the opponents.” What great advantages are gained by priests who are faithful to this

practice! With what unction they preach Christ! Far from flattering and soothing the hearts and minds of their audience, they stimulate them to better things, and arouse in them the desire of heavenly things.

There are many striking examples of the salutary effects of the reading of pious books. Outstanding is the case of Augustine whose great services to the Church had their origin in such reading: “Take, read; take, read; I took (the epistles of Paul the Apostle), I opened, I read in silence; it was as though the darkness of all my doubting was driven away by the light of peace which had entered my soul.”

In our own day, alas! it is the contrary that happens all too frequently. Members of the clergy allow their minds to be overcome gradually by the darkness of doubt and turn aside to worldly pursuits; the chief reason for this is that they prefer to read a variety of other works and newspapers, which are full of cunningly propounded errors and corruption, rather than the divine books and other pious literature.

Be on your guard, beloved sons; do not trust in your experience and mature years, do not be deluded by the vain hope that you can thus better serve the general good. Do not transgress the limits which are determined by the laws of the Church, nor go beyond what is suggested by prudence and charity towards oneself. Anyone who admits

this poison into his soul will rarely escape the disastrous consequences of the evil thus introduced.

4- Examination of Conscience

The benefits to be derived from spiritual reading and meditation will certainly be more abundant if the priest supplements them by an examination which will enable him to discern whether he is striving conscientiously to put into practice what he has learned in his reading and meditation.

Particularly relevant in this context is the excellent advice of Chrysostom which was intended especially for priests. Every night before going to sleep, "make your conscience appear in judgment; demand of it an account, and having thoroughly probed and dissected whatever evil purposes you formed during the day, repent for them."

The excellence of this practice and its fruitfulness for christian virtue are clearly established by the teaching of the great masters of the spiritual life. We are pleased to quote that remarkable passage from the rule of St. Bernard: "As

a searching investigator of the integrity of your own conduct, submit your life to a daily examination. Consider carefully what progress you have made or what ground you have lost... Strive to know yourself... Place all your faults before your eyes. Come face to face with yourself, as though you were another person, and then weep for your faults."

Experience shows that the man who frequently subjects his thoughts, words and actions to a strict examination, gains new strength of soul both to detest and

fly from evil and to desire and strive for the good.

It is also shown by experience that one who refuses to appear before the tribunal where justice sits in judgment, and conscience appears at once as the accused and the accuser, usually suffers grave loss and disadvantage thereby. Vainly too will one seek in the conduct of such a person for that circumspection, so highly prized in the christian, that tries to avoid even venial faults, or that sense of reverence, so

becoming in a priest, which shudders at even the slightest offense to God.

For our own part, beloved sons, when we reflect upon these matters, as is

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our bounden duty, we are overcome with grief and our voice breaks into lamentation.

Woe to the priest who fails to respect his high dignity, and defiles by his infidelities the name of the holy God for whom he is bound to be holy. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. “Sublime is the dignity of the priest, but great is his fall, if he is guilty of sin; let us rejoice for the high honor, but let us fear for them lest they fall; great is the joy that they have scaled the heights, but it is insignificant compared with the sorrow of their fall from on high.” (St. Jerome)

Woe then to the priest who so far forgets himself that he abandons the practice of prayer, rejects the nourishment of spiritual reading and never turns his attention inwards upon himself to hear the accusing voice of conscience.

Final Exhortation

Your sanctification has, indeed, first place in our thoughts and in our cares; therefore, with our eyes raised to heaven, we frequently pray for the whole clergy,

repeating the words of Christ, our Lord: “*Holy Father... sanctify them.*” (Jn 17:11.17)

It is a source of joy to us that we are joined in that prayer by very many from among the faithful of every condition who are gravely concerned for your welfare and that of the Church; it is no less a source of joy that there are many generous souls, not only within the cloister but in the midst of the busy world, who offer themselves continuously as victims to God for the same object.

May the Lord graciously deign to accept, as a sweet perfume, their pure and sublime prayers, and may he not refuse our own humble supplication; we implore him, in his merciful providence, to come to our aid, and may he pour forth upon all the clergy the riches of grace, charity and virtue which repose in the most pure Heart of his beloved Son.

Beloved sons, we pray that the peace of Christ may reign in your hearts with the joy of the Holy Spirit; as a pledge of this we bestow on all with the deepest affection the Apostolic benediction.



Liturgical Catechetical Institute
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