

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

The Priest Devoted to Mary (1st part)

By Saint Joseph Cafasso

The Portrait of a Priest Devoted to Mary

When the priest has succeeded in forming for himself this kind of idea, this concept of Mary, it will be easy for him to become devoted to her. Oh! what great things I promise myself, I hope for and expect from the priest whose heart is full of love for this great Mother! How happy and fruitful his life will be when it

is spent under the care and affection of this tender Mother! There will be no one more content than this son, no one more joyous, more confident, more generous, more loving than he. Have you not often observed how a child behaves with its mother? When the mother is present, and especially when she has the child in her arms, it is brave and confident, it laughs and plays; whom could you find more joyful, more talkative, more

courageous than it? But suppose the mother goes away and is hidden from its view; as soon as it notices it and looking round is no longer able to see her, it suddenly stops its childish prattle and becomes sad, melancholic, timid, afraid; everything alarms it, everything terrifies it ; by its whole appearance, but more by its cries and tears, it will tell you how unhappy it is, that nothing will satisfy it, that everything makes it sad. And why? Because its mother cannot be seen. But if you pass from that contentment and courage which the presence of

the mother gives the child to the way that it behaves towards her, you will be witness of the most tender caresses which, though childish, are most expressive and significant. What looks, what impetuous attempts to leap for joy, what embraces! Everything speaks eloquently of a loving and affectionate heart; if anyone else speaks, the child will give no sign that it gives it any pleasure, but if the mother speaks you will see, if not by its words, at least by its gestures and smiles, the pleasure it takes in it. You have, my dear Fathers, in these few reflections

Saint Joseph Cafasso

St Joseph Cafasso lived in the city of Turin, Italy, in the 19th century, and was known as a model of priestly life. He is famous for his pastoral care of criminals, especially those condemned to death. He stood by their side as they were led to the execution, bringing them to repentance by showing them the mercy and compassion of God. While working in the ecclesiastical college in the city, which was dedicated to forming diocesan priests, among



his students was another future saint, John Bosco, whom he had known from childhood. St Joseph was also known for guiding his flock with kindness and serenity. His fellow citizens had such high regard for this devout priest that they suggested he take a place in the legislative assembly. He refused, however, saying, "In the day of judgment, the Lord will ask me if I was a good priest, not a good deputy." His legacy can be seen in the deep devotion to the Saint, who died in Turin on June 23, 1860, at the age of 49.

the portrait of the priest devoted to Mary; for the priest devoted to this tender Mother becomes simple and innocent like a little child. Mary, after God, is everything for him, and there is nothing else that consoles him, contents him, restrains him, sustains him so much as the thought of and affection for this good Mother.

The first priests, the Apostles, were very fortunate, and we cannot help experiencing a certain praiseworthy envy at their happy lot of being able to see Mary, to speak to her, to live with her and to pray with her. Now, the priest who is devoted to this good Mother, and, like another Jesus, lives subject to her, obedient and affectionate, in strict truth is not far away from the happy lot of the Apostles. He can be said to live with her, he shares his fears and his hopes with her; with her he makes his plans for his undertakings and his labors; in fine, this son belongs to Mary entirely, and appears to have no other life outside of her: whether he thinks or speaks or works, all is for her.

The Priest Devoted to Mary will Speak and Think Often of Her

When a person loves it is natural that he should think of the object loved, that he should speak often of it and with pleasure; that he should study the way to see it and to enjoy its presence as much as possible. It is a kind of love unheard of, to love a person and at the same time to avoid

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that person's company and conversation. Language is the most ordinary way of expressing the sentiments of the heart. Observe a person who is passionately fond of riches, of hunting, of certain games, of traveling etc. The way and the frequency with which he speaks of what he prefers, the knowledge and

skill that he displays in speaking of it reveal to us at once the passion that dominates him. Do you wish then to know whether a certain priest is much or little devoted to Mary? Observe his manner, observe the sensations he expresses when he looks at an image of Mary, when he speaks of her, or hears others speak of her; penetrate, if

you can, into his mind and heart to perceive the tenderness of his affection towards her. If in the course of the day, he turns often to Mary; if in the difficulties and vicissitudes of this life he puts his trust in her help; if in the exercise of his ministry, in the pulpit, in the confessional, in his familiar discourses, he is ingenious in seizing the least occasion, and is most dexterous in speaking of her, and if it is evident that this is not done artfully or by an effort, but naturally and joyfully, and even with transports of delight; if, I say, such effects result, then you may conclude that he is a true son of Mary.

On the other hand, a dry cold manner of speaking of her is not a good sign; a priest may say nice things and even amazing things, but the most necessary thing is wanting: there is wanting that warmth, that heart-felt affection which is the characteristic of the lover; in a word, he does not speak as a son. Imagine to yourselves a son full of affection for his mother and imagine what he says about her; put these same words

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on the lips of anyone else; materially, there will be no difference; the same terms will be used in praising and extolling her, but you will see a great difference; in the language of the first you will see a different force, a different

unction, and you will experience a different impression; the reason of the difference is that one is a son, the other is not; one loves, the other is cold and indifferent.

Consider the writings and the lives of the Saints of all times, such as St. John Damascene, St. Cyril, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and in later times St. Alphonsus; ponder over the way they wrote and spoke

of Mary; what words inflamed with love they used, what beautiful ideas they expressed, what eagerness and joy they showed in praising and exalting her; is there any need to ask whether these Saints loved Mary and were devoted to her? Anyone will be persuaded and convinced that such language could only come from a heart that feels, from a soul that loves. All over the world innumerable good and holy souls, even

among the simple and unlettered, have given proof of the same devotion to Mary. If you ask them are you fond of Mary? Do you love this good Mother? You may be sure that they will be all eagerness to satisfy you, and that they will say with emotion: And why not be fond of her? How would it be possible not to love her? Ah ! I only wish to know what I could do to love her more; if I knew it, I would do it at any cost. Thus those who are truly devoted to Mary feel, and thus they speak; can we say as much of the priest, this beloved eldest son nearest to the heart of this Mother?

The Priest Devoted to Mary Will Take Care not to Offend of Her

Other indications of devotion to Mary, which are at the same time indispensable conditions that the priest can be truly said to belong to her, are these: that he take care not to offend her, and that he endeavor to imitate her Divine Son. In the first place he must take good care not to offend her, not to displease her, and that not only in matters amounting to grave sin which, as all can see, is incompatible with even an ordinary or common love, but also in small light matters. Between two people who love one another in such a way that they only

stop short of not hating each other, of being outright enemies, small offenses, slight displeasures are not noticed very much. But between two hearts that love each other truly, between two persons who profess to love each other, even small acts of discourtesy are regarded as a great evil: an inopportune joke, a hasty word, a careless act, a want in showing esteem, may sometimes give rise to trouble, to unpleasantness, to coldness and suspicion. What would you say of a son who, in his conduct towards his own mother, just stopped short of not offending her gravely, but was completely indifferent about smaller offenses because they did not make her weep or die of sorrow? If you were to say to such a son: Look here, my dear man, don't you know



that what you are doing displeases your mother, disturbs her mind and makes her uneasy, afflicts her and makes her spend her days in sadness and gloom? And if you were to get the reply: what does that matter to me? As long as what I am doing does not afflict her so far as to cause her death, it is sufficient for me, and I don't want any more. What would I say of such a man? Well, that is a picture of a priest who cares little about offending Mary in small matters: he knows that these jests, that light conduct, that want of guard in looking and speaking, although they do not amount to mortal sin, nevertheless cannot be pleasing to this Mother of purity and candor; he knows that they disgust her, that they afflict her, all the more because they come from the priest, her son of predilection; nevertheless, he will not abstain from doing them, he even beguiles himself and soothes his conscience by saying: it is not serious, it does not amount to a mortal sin. Ah! my dear Fathers, if that were true of any of us, it would be useless for us to pretend; we would be very far from being true and devoted sons of Mary.

O priest who aspires to become a true son of Mary, I give you as a rule to guide you that you have this thought ever present in your mind: never do anything that your heart tells you is

displeasing to Mary; and in addition, never deny her anything that you know she would welcome and desire from you. Sleep protracted in the mornings to the detriment of pious exercises and the works of the ministry, haste in celebrating Mass and in Church functions, eagerness to gain from the exercise of the ministry, hours lost in useless secular affairs, frequent visits to certain persons, looking at and losing time with everything that presents itself, are not things that a good priest will do, and certainly cannot be pleasing to Mary; I must therefore abstain from them. And then, in order to please this Mother, I will make some act of mortification: I will cast down my eyes, suppress that word, deny myself that amusement; I will make a visit to the church, practice some devotion, some act of virtue. I know that there is no harm in this, that there is no obligation to do that, but I know also that they provide an occasion to please Mary, I will therefore give her the pleasure. Give me a priest who allows himself to be guided by this thought during the day, and without seeking any other indication, I will give you a true and devoted son of Mary.

The second means, no less essential, by which we can become pleasing to Mary is to make ourselves true copies,

true portraits of our great Exemplar, her Divine Son. Our Divine Redeemer on the Cross, with His Own lips, entrusted us to the care of the tender heart of His Blessed Mother. He left us to her to have instead of Himself, to occupy His place in her heart, so that in looking after us, loving us, working for us, she regards us as holding the place of her Son. Mary, as was natural, knew to its depths the spirit and the Heart of her Divine Son: she held Him in her arms, she had the care of Him for thirty years, she was constantly present at His discourses during the three years of His public life, she was present at the end when He hung on the Cross. All that, besides what she knew by other extraordinary means, rendered her conscious of the wishes and even identified her with the designs of her Divine son, for she saw His objects, His wishes, His desires, His designs; she knew the importance, the nature and the scope of His mission; the ways

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and means He used; the eagerness, patience and charity with which He labored to attain His objects; she knew the standard, the regulations, the lessons and example that He left His priests to whom He gave the charge of continuing His mission. Bearing this in mind, I ask you how can you expect that Mary will be satisfied and content with a priest whom, having been left to her and put in her charge as another son, she sees different from, and out of tone and harmony with her Divine Son; different in his tendencies, discordant in his affections, in his ends and his mode of working?

Fine consolation that for a poor mother who having lost a respectful, obedient and affectionate Son, sees substituted another, indocile, cold, and disrespectful. Every look and every word of his would only serve to render more bitter the loss of the first, and more painful the exchange.

Who then among priests can be regarded as truly devoted sons of

Mary? That priest, and that priest alone who renders himself conformable to the original, that priest who forms in himself a copy, a portrait of the great Son of Mary; that is to say, a priest who is hardworking and zealous, a priest who keeps himself aloof from the tumult and intrigues of the world, who watches carefully over himself and seeks no other end but the honor and glory of his God and the salvation of souls; so that, to use our earthly way of expressing it, every time that Mary looks down from Heaven and sees him, she will be able to hear reechoed and repeated to her: "Woman, behold thy son." Mother look at your son, study him carefully; you will see that he is a real son because he has a real resemblance to your Divine Son: he thinks and works like your Son. Like Him, he is retired, attentive, obedient and affectionate to you; like Him, he works solely for the interest of the Eternal Father and does not occupy himself or lose

his time with the wretched things of this earth. Conscious and persuaded of the importance of his Heavenly mission, he goes on repeating the words of your Divine Son. "I must be about My Father's business," and like Him, goes wherever the glory and the will of his Heavenly Father demands. Ah! yes, I repeat, he is truly your son, reborn, risen again, a true copy; take him, embrace him, love him: Woman, behold thy Son! He, the true son of Mary, alone has the right to expect the special graces and favors of this Mother; to him deservedly will come direct the beautiful words: "Behold thy Mother." Son, look and be consoled, I entrust you to My Mother, I place you in her arms. Oh! what a moment! what happy embrace of Mother and Son! In some danger, in some trouble, in some crisis of life and death, Mary will say: "Be of good heart, son, I am your Mother," and the priest will exclaim: "Save me, I am your son."



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