



CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

LETTER TO PRIESTS

Dear Priests,

on the forthcoming solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (June 15, 2012), as usual, we shall celebrate *World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of the Clergy*. The expression found in Scripture “*This is the will of God: your holiness!*” (1 Thess 4:3), though addressed to all Christians, refers to us priests in particular, for we have accepted the invitation to “sanctify ourselves” and to become “*ministers of sanctification*” for our brothers.

In our case, this “will of God” is, so to speak, doubled and multiplied to infinity, and we must obey it in everything we do.

This is our wonderful destiny: we cannot be sanctified without working on the holiness of our brothers, and we cannot work on the holiness of our brothers unless we have first worked on and continue to work on our own holiness.

Ushering the Church into the new millennium, the Blessed John Paul II reminded us that this “ideal of perfection”, which must be offered to everyone, is normal indeed: “*To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do you wish to become holy?’*”¹

On the day of our Priestly Ordination the same baptismal question surely resounded in our heart, calling for a personal answer; but it was also entrusted to us so that we might address it to the faithful, cherishing its beauty and preciousness.

This does not mean that we are not aware of our personal shortcomings, or of the faults committed by some who have brought shame upon the priesthood before the world.

Ten years later – considering that the situation has grown ever more serious – we must let the words pronounced by John Paul II on Holy Thursday of 2002 resound in our heart with greater strength and urgency:

“At this time too, as priests we are personally and profoundly afflicted by the sins of some of our brothers who have betrayed the grace of Ordination in succumbing even to the most grievous forms of the *mysterium iniquitatis* at work in the world. Grave scandal is caused, with the result that a dark shadow of suspicion is cast over all the other fine priests who perform their ministry with honesty and integrity and often

¹ Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 31.

with heroic self-sacrifice. As the Church shows her concern for the victims and strives to respond in truth and justice to each of these painful situations, all of us – conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace – are called to embrace the “*mysterium Crucis*” and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness. We must beg God in his Providence to prompt a whole-hearted reawakening of those ideals of total self-giving to Christ which are the very foundation of the priestly ministry.”²

As ministers of God’s mercy, we know that the search for holiness can always begin again through repentance and forgiveness. But we also feel the need to ask for it, as individual priests, on behalf of all priests and for all priests³.

Our faith is further strengthened by the Church’s invitation to cross the *Porta fidei* again, accompanying all of our faithful.

As we know, this is the title of the Apostolic Letter with which the Holy Father Benedict XVI called the *Year of Faith* that will begin on October 12, 2012.

It may be useful to reflect on the circumstances of this invitation.

It takes place on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (October 11, 1962) and on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (October 11, 1992). Furthermore, the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in October 2012, and its theme will be *The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith*.

We will therefore be expected to work in depth on each of these “chapters”:

– on II Vatican Council, so that it may be accepted once again as “*the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century*”: “a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning”, “increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church”⁴;

– on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that it may be truly accepted and used as “a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith”⁵;

– on the preparation of the next *Synod of Bishops* in order that it may truly be “a good opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith.”⁶

For the time being – as an introduction to this work – we can meditate briefly on this indication provided by the Pope, towards which everything converges:

“It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to

² JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday 2002*.

³ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The priest, minister of Divine Mercy. An aid for confessors and spiritual directors*, 9 March 2011, 14-18; 74-76; 110-116 (the priest as penitent and spiritual disciple).

⁴ Cfr. *Porta fidei*, n.5.

⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 5.

himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new. Today too, there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.”⁷

“*The people of every generation*”, “*all the peoples of the earth*”, “*new evangelization*”: before such a universal horizon, us priests must ask ourselves how and where such statements can come together and stand.

So we can begin by recalling that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* itself begins with a universal outlook, recognizing “*Man’s ‘capacity’ for God*”⁸; but it does so choosing – as its first quotation – the following text of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council:

“The root reason (“*eximia ratio*”) for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love (“*ex amore*”), and constantly preserved by it (“*ex amore*”); and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator. Still, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it.” (“*hanc intimam ac vitalem coniunctionem cum Deo*”)⁹.

How could we forget that, with the text quoted above – and in the richness of the wording chosen – the Conciliar Fathers intended to speak directly to atheists, upholding the immense dignity of the vocation from which they had departed? And they did so with the same words used to describe the Christian experience, at the peak of its mystic intensity!

The Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* also begins stating that it “ushers us into the life of communion with God”, which means that it allows us to become directly immersed in the central mystery of the faith we are called to profess: “To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love” (*ibid.* n. 1).

All this must resound in a special way in our heart and in our mind, making us aware of what is the greatest tragedy of our times.

Christianized nations are no longer tempted to surrender to a general sort of atheism (as they were in the past) which results from having forgotten the beauty and warmth of the Trinitarian Revelation.

⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 7.


⁸ Section One. Chapter I.


⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 27.

Today it is especially priests, in their daily worship and ministry, who must refer everything to the *Trinitarian Communion*: only by starting from it and by immersing oneself in it can the faithful really discover the face of the Son of God and of His contemporariness, and really reach the heart of every man and the homeland they are all called to. Only this way can us priests restore contemporary man's dignity, the sense of human relationships and social life, and the purpose of the whole of creation. "Believing in only One God who is love": no new evangelization will really be possible unless us Christians are able to surprise and move the world again by proclaiming the Nature of Our God who is Love, in the Three Divine Persons that express it and that involve us in their own life.

Today's world, with its ever more painful and preoccupying lacerations, needs God-The Trinity, and the Church has the task to proclaim Him. In order to fulfil this task, the Church must remain indissolubly embraced with Christ and never part from Him; it needs Saints who dwell "in the heart of Jesus" and are happy witnesses of God's *Trinitarian Love*. And in order to serve the Church and the World, Priests need to be Saints!

From the Vatican, March 26, 2012
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the B.V.


Mauro Card. Piacenza
Prefect

+ 
✠ Celso Morgia Iruzubieta
Tit. Archbishop of Alba Marittima
Secretary

READINGS AND TEXTS
for further reflection or celebrations

BIBLE READINGS

From *John's Gospel*, 15:14-17

From *Luke's Gospel*, 22:14-27

From *John's Gospel*, 20:19-23

From the *Letter to the Hebrews*, 5:1-10

PATRISTIC READINGS

St. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *On the Priesthood*, III, 4-5; 6.

ORIGEN, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 7, 5.

READINGS FROM THE MAGISTERIUM

Gaudium et Spes, n. 19 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 27.

JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday*, 2001.

Benedict XVI, *Homily of Holy Thursday*, April 13, 2006.

READINGS from the WRITINGS of the SAINTS

SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, *Dialogues*, 4, 59.

SAINT CATHERINE FROM SIENA, *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, Ch. 116; cfr. SI 104, 15.

SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX, Ms A 56r; LT 108; LT 122; LT 101; Pr n. 8.

BLESSED CHARLES DE FOUCAULD, *Ecrits Spirituels*, pp. 69-70.

SAINT TERESA BENEDICT OF THE CROSS (EDITH STEIN), WS, 23.

PRAYER FOR THE HOLY CHURCH AND FOR PRIESTS

O my Jesus, I beg You on behalf of the whole Church:
Grant it love and the light of Your Spirit,
and give power to the words of Priests
so that hardened hearts might be brought to repentance and return to You, O Lord.
Lord, give us holy Priests;
You yourself maintain them in holiness.
O Divine and Great High Priest,
may the power of Your mercy
accompany them everywhere and protect them
from the devil's traps and snares
which are continually being set for the soul of Priests.
May the power of Your mercy,
O Lord, shatter and bring to naught
all that might tarnish the sanctity of Priests,
for You can do all things.

My beloved Jesus,
I pray to you for the triumph of the Church,
that you may bless the Holy Father and all the clergy;
I beg you to grant the grace of conversion
to sinners whose hearts have been hardened by sin,
and a special blessing and light to priests,
to whom I shall confess for all of my life.

(Saint Faustina Kowalska)



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR PRIESTS

1. *“It is for their sakes that I sanctify myself, so that they, too, may be sanctified by the truth” (Jn 17:19).*
Do I really take holiness seriously in my priesthood? Am I convinced that the success of my priestly ministry comes from God and that, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, I have to identify myself with Christ and give my life for the salvation of the world?
2. *“This is my body” (Mt 26:26).*
Is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass the centre of my spiritual life? Do I prepare well to celebrate Mass? Do I devoutly celebrate the Mass? Do I make an act of thanksgiving after Mass? Is the Mass the centre of my day in giving thanks and praise to God for his blessings? Do I have recourse to his goodness? Do I make reparation for my sins and for those of all mankind?
3. *“Zeal for your house consumes me” (Jn 2:17).*
Do I celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to the rites and rubrics established by the Church? Do I celebrate Holy Mass with a right intention and according to the approved liturgical books? Am I attentive to the sacred species conserved in the tabernacle and careful to renew it periodically? Do I pay due attention to the sacred vessels and ensure their conservation? Do I wear in a dignified fashion all of the sacred vestments prescribed by the Church? Am I conscious that I act *in persona Christi Capitis*?
4. *“Remain in my love” (Jn 15:9).*
Do I enjoy being in the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, in meditation and in silent adoration? Am I faithful to the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament? Is the tabernacle my true treasure?
5. *“Explain the parable to us” (Mt 13:36).*
Do I carefully make a daily meditation and try to overcome all distractions that separate me from God? Do I seek illumination from the Lord whom I serve? Do I assiduously meditate on the Sacred Scriptures? Do I carefully say my habitual prayers?
6. *It is necessary to “pray always and without tiring” (Lk 18:1)*
Do I celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours every day in an integral, dignified, attentive and devout manner? Am I faithful to my commitment to Christ in this important aspect of my ministry, praying in the name of the entire Church?
7. *“Come and follow me” (Mt 19:21).*
Is the Lord Jesus Christ the true love of my life? Do I joyfully observe my commitment to love before God in celibate continence? Am I given to impure thoughts, desires or actions? Do I indulge in improper conversation? Have I allowed myself to be in the proximate occasion of sin against chastity? Do I observe custody of the eyes? Have I been prudent in my dealings with the various categories of persons? Does my life represent for the faithful a true witness to the fact that holy purity is possible, fruitful and joyful?
8. *“Who are you?” (Jn 1:20).*
In my daily life, am I weak, lazy or indolent? Do my conversations conform to a sense of the natural and supernatural that a priest should have? Am I careful to ensure that there are no elements of vanity or superficiality in my life? Are all my actions consistent with my priestly state?
9. *“The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt. 8:20).*
Do I love Christian poverty? Does my heart belong to God? Am I spiritually detached from everything else? Am I prepared to make sacrifices to better serve God? Am I prepared to give up my comforts, personal plans, and legitimate contacts, for God? Do I possess superfluous things? Do I make unnecessary expenditure or am I taken over by consumerism? Do I use my free time so as to be close to God remembering that I am always a priest – even at these times of rest or vacation?
10. *“You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to mere children” (Mt 11:25).*
Am I guilty of the sins of pride: spiritual difficulties, susceptibility, irritation, unwillingness to forgive, tendencies to despondency, etc.? Do I ask God to give me the virtue of humility?

11. *“And there flowed out blood and water” (Jn 19:34).*

Am I convinced that when I act “in the person of Christ” I am directly involved with the same Body of Christ, the Church? Can I sincerely say that I love the Church? Can I sincerely say that I strive with joy for her growth? Am I concerned for her interests, those of all her members and for the whole human race?

12. *“You are Peter” (Mt 16:18).*

Nil sine Episcopo – nothing without the Bishop – was a saying of St Ignatius of Antioch. Are these words at the root of my ministry? Do I receive orders, counsels or correction from my Ordinary with docility? Do I pray often for the Holy Father? Am I in full communion with his teaching and intentions?

13. *“Love one another” (Jn 13:34).*

Have I been charitable in dealing with my brother priests? Does my egoism leave me indifferent to them? Have I criticised my brother priests? Have I supported those who are morally or physically ill? Am I committed to fraternal action so that no one is ever left alone? Do I treat all my brother priests and all of the laity with the charity and patience of Christ?

14. *“I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).*

Is my knowledge of the teaching of the Church as comprehensive as it should be? Do I assimilate and transmit her teachings? Am I conscious that to teach something contrary to the Magisterium, solemn or ordinary, is gravely abusive and causes damage to the faithful?

15. *“Go and sin no more” (Jn 8:11).*

Proclamation of the Word leads the faithful to the Sacraments. Do I regularly go to Confession? Do I frequently go to Confession in accordance with my state of life and because of the sacred things with which I am involved? Do I generously celebrate the Sacrament of Penance? Am I reasonably available to the faithful for spiritual direction and do I set particular times aside for this purpose? Do I carefully prepare to instruct in catechesis? Do I preach with zeal and with the love of God?

16. *“He called those to himself whom he willed and these went with him” (Mk 3:13).*

Am I careful to promote vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life? Do I promote a greater awareness of the universal call to holiness among the faithful? Do I encourage the faithful to pray for vocations and for the sanctification of the clergy?

17. *“The Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28).*

Have I sought to devote myself to others and serve them every day according to the demands of the Gospel? Do I give witness to the Lord’s charity by good works? Do I see the presence of Christ in the Cross and do I see in it the triumph of love? Is my daily activity marked by a spirit of service? Do I consider the exercise of authority as a form of service?

18. *“I thirst” (Jn 19:28).*

Have I prayed and generously made sacrifices for the good of the souls entrusted to my care by God? Do I discharge my pastoral duties? Am I solicitous for the Holy Souls?

19. *“Behold your son. Behold your mother” (Jn 19: 26-27).*

Do I entrust myself, full of hope, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Priests, through love and to love all the more her son Jesus Christ? Do I practice Marian devotion? Do I say the Rosary every day? Do I have recourse to her maternal intercession in my struggles with the devil, concupiscence, and the world?

20. *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:44).*

Am I solicitous in assisting and in administering the sacraments to the dying? In my personal meditation, in catechesis and in my ordinary preaching, do I give consideration to the Church’s teaching on the Last Things? Do I ask for the grace of perseverance? Do I ask the faithful to do likewise? Do I make frequent and devout suffrage for the souls of the faithful departed?