

Address of
Pope Paul VI
to
13th Pastoral Updating Study Week
September 6, 1963

Translation provided by NCWC News Service

YOU have participated in the 13th Pastoral Updating Study Week, promoted by the Pastoral Orientation Center, well known to Us, which is sponsored by Msgr. Grazioso Ceriani, a dear friend, and you have been the welcomed guests of the zealous Bishop Virginio Dondeo of Orvieto in the incomparable setting of that city and that cathedral, to commemorate the seventh centenary of the eucharistic devotion of the "*Corpus Christi*," which traces its first official source and its universal and still resplendent irradiation from the miracle of the nearby town of Bolsena and from the papal bull "*Transiturus*" of our distant predecessor Urban IV.

We are greatly pleased by this event, which We have followed with interest and in which We ourself would have participated if Providence had not disposed otherwise with Our elevation to the Roman Pontificate, an office which has immensely increased Our appreciation of that congress.

Therefore this encounter is all the more welcome, and all the more fervent are Our wishes for the many and enduring fruits which the aforesaid week may produce. The letter which Our Cardinal Secretary of State has addressed to Msgr. Ceriani on this occasion, and which you have received with such reverence, bears witness to these sentiments.

What remains for Us to add to all that has already been said on the central theme of the week, "The Eucharist and the Christian Community," and said with such abundance and competence, and which has been meditated upon and translated into magnificent and pious acts of devotion with reverence and understanding?

Trying to search into your minds as to what you expect of Us, We believe that We see you waiting for Our approval and Our recognition of your visit here before Us as a significant offering. We note especially that you come brandishing as a banner a word which defines the method of your work: "updating" ("*aggiornamento*").

This is a word which had the honor of being taken up by Our venerable and lamented predecessor John XXIII of happy memory, and it was inscribed by him in the program of the ecumenical council.

The word "updating," when applied to the ecclesiastical field indicates the relation between the eternal values of Christian truth and their insertion in the dynamic reality of human life which is

so extraordinarily changeable today, which in our present history is restless, confused and fertile, and which is continuously and variously reshaping itself.

It is a word which indicates the relative and experimental aspect of the ministry of salvation, which has nothing more greatly at heart than to succeed efficaciously, and which sees how much its efficacy is conditioned upon the cultural, moral and social state of the souls to which it is directed. The ministry knows, furthermore, how timely for good culture, but especially for the practical increase of the apostolate, is the knowledge of other experiences and taking the good among them as its own: "test all things; hold fast that which is good".¹

It is a word which demonstrates fear of outmoded customs, of delaying fatigue, of incomprehensible forms, of neutralizing distances, of presumptuous and unsuspected ignorance about new human phenomena, as well as little confidence in the perennial application and productivity of the Gospel.

It is a word which may seem to give servile honor to capricious and fleeting fads, to unbelieving existentialism in transcendent objective values and is hungry only for the fullness of the momentary and subjective. Instead, it assigns due importance to the rapid and inexorable passing of phenomena in which our life develops and seeks to correspond to the celebrated recommendation of the Apostle: "make the most of your time, because the days are evil."²

It is a word, therefore, which We also accept with pleasure, as an expression of the desire to give testimony to the timelessness of the ecclesiastical ministry and therefore to its modern vitality.

Apropos of this, We must welcome also another term which qualifies the activity which you (bishops and pastors) promote and follow. We mean the word "pastoral." Today it is a program and a glorious word.

As is known, the ecumenical council has made it its own, and has made it the center of its reforming and renewing purposes.

There is no need to see in this adjective, which is associated with the highest and most characteristic manifestations of ecclesiastical life, an unnoticed but injurious tendency toward the

¹ 1 *Thes.* 5:21.

² *Eph.* 5:16.

pragmatism and activism of our time, to the detriment of interior life and contemplation, which should have the first places in our evaluation of religious things. Such primacy remains even if in practice the apostolic demands of the kingdom of God in the affairs of contemporary life require preferential use of time and energies in the exercise of charity toward one's neighbor.

Let no one believe that this pastoral solicitude which the Church underlines in its program today, which absorbs its attention and requires its care—let no one believe that this signifies a change of judgment regarding the errors spread in our society and already condemned by the Church, such as atheistic marxism for example.

To seek to apply careful and healing remedies to a contagious and lethal disease does not mean that one changes his opinion about it. It means rather that he seeks to combat it, not only theoretically but also practically. It means that he follows diagnosis with therapy, that he applies healing charity to doctrinal condemnation.

It would be similarly rash to see in the importance given to pastoral activity a forgetfulness or a rivalry with theological speculation. This latter retains its dignity and its excellence even if the impelling needs of ecclesiastical life demand that sacred teaching not remain purely speculative, but be considered and cultivated in the complete framework of the Christian economy.

Doctrine is given to us to practice a true religion, to be announced to souls and to demonstrate its saving powers in the historic reality. In the life of the Church today, mind and will, desire and labor, truth and action, doctrine and apostolate, faith and charity, magisterium and ministry assume complementary functions, always closer and more organic and with reciprocal splendor and increase.

Having said that much, We are pleased also on this occasion to render honor to the evangelical and apostolic qualities of the pastoral activities of you who are present here. We are reminded of a name by which Jesus Christ chose to describe Himself to us; and with the name, the ineffable, gentle and heroic figure of the Good Shepherd; and with the figure, the mission of guide, master, guardian and savior, which Christ made His own for love of us, and which He gave to Peter.

There comes to mind one of the most flowering branches of practical theology, pastoral theology, which is the Church's own

art and science, enriched by special gifts and charisma, of the salvation of souls. It is the science by which the Church knows souls, approaches them, instructs and educates them, guides them, serves them, defends, loves and sanctifies them.

There comes to mind the humble and the great common expression of the sacerdotal ministry: the care of souls, the charity of the Church in act, in its most usual, assiduous, often most generous and certainly most necessary guise.

We take this occasion to show Our highest esteem, Our special benevolence, Our fraternal and great encouragement for the pastors of souls. This special recognition, which your distinguished pastoral study arouses in Us, is due to them, for We Ourselves have been a pastor, first in a diocese, which seems to have been an experimental field of typical and positive pastoral importance in past centuries under St. Ambrose and St. Charles, and as it still is today after the servants of God, Cardinals Ferrari and Schuster. And We are a pastor today on this Chair of Peter to which We have been called by Christ to feed the flock of His Church.

Our expression of affectionate devotion is due to them because the pastoral ministry binds them to complete dedication as the word and example of Jesus our Master teaches us: "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."³ It is due to them because their dedication touches the summit of charity, as again Christ Himself admonishes us: "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends."⁴

Our encouragement is due to the pastors of souls, to the bishops and the pastors especially, and to all others who are dedicated to pastoral cares, because We know under what conditions they labor today. The spiritual state of the world today presents enormous difficulties, some of which were unknown until yesterday.

We know what apprehensions weigh so often on the heart of a bishop, what sufferings often afflict him, not only for the poverty of means even now so grave and mortifying, but because of the deafness of those who should hear his words, for the diffidence which surrounds him and isolates him, for the indifference and lack of respect which disturb his ministry and paralyze him.

³ *John* 10:11.

⁴ *John* 15:13.

We know how many pastors and assistant pastors exercise the care of souls in vast and populated areas where the number, mentality, the exigencies of the inhabitants force them to unceasing and tiring labors. We also know how many priests must exercise their ministry in the hidden little towns, without companionship, without help and the comforts that would result from these.

Both the former and the latter often must live in dire economic conditions, often opposed and misunderstood and forced to live on their own resources. Their pay is only to find in the humble who surround them, in the sacred book of their prayers and in the tabernacle, the mystery of the Divine Presence.

We feel obliged to assure these dear and venerated brothers, overworked laborers of the Gospel, these modest and persevering ministers of the Church of God, that the Pope thinks of them, understands them, esteems them, assists them, loves them, and therefore follows them with his prayers and blessings.

This reference to the communion of spirit which unites Us in the great ranks of the priesthood engaged in the care of souls brings Us to the conclusion of Our discourse, at which point We would like to remark about the theme treated during your week of pastoral updating studies, that is, "The Eucharist and the Christian Community."

We hope that your reflection on this theme, so doctrinally and spiritually rich, will continue in the exercise of your ministry. We hope that it will confirm in you the conviction that no other action realizes in itself the fulness of grace and pastoral efficacy as much as the celebration of the Divine Sacrifice. In this sacrifice, on the one hand, the superhuman power of priestly orders renders really present, in sacramental form the true humanity of Christ, Head of the whole Mystical Body and of each single local community. On the other hand, the pastoral mission entrusted to the priest in care of souls is bound to render really present, in community form, the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church.

May the exciting consciousness of the antecedent and consequent relation of our priesthood with the Eucharist continue to nourish it. The priesthood is the minister generator of such a sacrament and therefore is its first adorer, its knowing revealer and its tireless distributor.

Let there be assigned to your priesthood as its first duty, also under the aspect of charity and of pastoral productivity, that sub-

lime celebration of the Mass which you have in common. Celebrate the Mass in such manner that it be punctual and perfect in its ritual, that it be simple in its solemnity and solemn in its simplicity, that it be recollected in silence and in the orderliness of the assembly and unison of prayer and song, that it be meaningful and mysterious in its significance, that it be carried out with the participation of all.

May it be devoutly and cordially assisted by all, by children, by youth, by students, by workers, by every social group, by men and women, by entire families, by Catholic associations and by institutions located within the parish. May it be devoutly attended with particular attention by the Sisters, the holy flowers of our parishes; devoutly attended by the suffering, the afflicted, the aged, the poor, by all the people of God, by the whole community invited together with the priest who functions there in the person of Christ and at the same time interprets and represents the Christian people.

The priest expresses there his own "royal priesthood" in a way that renews and perpetuates the phenomenon, the index and the vertex of the common royalty, of the first "multitude of the believers" who were, as is written in the Acts of the Apostles, "of one heart and one soul."⁵

May it continue, We repeat, and may it spread, and to the realization of this wish We impart Our apostolic blessing.

⁵ *Acts* 4:32.