


THE CURÉ OF ABBÉ



Encyclical of His Holiness
POPE JOHN XXIII
ON THE PRIESTHOOD

(*Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*)

This Encyclical Letter—*Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*—was issued on August 1, 1959.

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The front cover photograph, from *LE PÈLERINAGE D'ARS* by Msgr. Francis Trochu, shows the famous statue of the Curé d'Ars by Emilien Cabuchet. This is considered a masterpiece of French sculpturing and is the closest likeness of the Saint. While the Curé was in his church praying, and without his knowledge, the artist fashioned a wax model which he concealed behind his large hat as he worked. From this model he later sculptured the imposing carrara marble statue now to be seen in Ars.

The photograph on the back cover, taken from *THE CURÉ D'ARS: A PICTORIAL BIOGRAPHY*, published by P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York, shows the statue erected at the place where the Saint, on his way to take over his new assignment, asked a small shepherd boy for directions saying: "Show me the way to Ars and I will show you the way to Heaven."



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*Encyclical Letter of
His Holiness, John XXIII
by Divine Providence Pope*

ON THE ONE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ST. JEAN MARIE VIANNEY

*To Our Venerable Brethren,
the Patriarchs, Primates,
Archbishops and Bishops Having
Peace and Communion with the Holy See.*

VENERABLE BRETHREN:

GREETING AND APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION

The beginnings of Our priesthood, which were filled with rich and blessed consolations, recall to Our memory an event which affected Us powerfully and profoundly: the sacred ceremonies held in the majesty of St. Peter's Basilica on January 8, 1905, when that humble French priest Jean Marie Baptiste Vianney was beatified. We, who had been raised to the dignity of the priesthood only a few months before, were delighted that Our Predecessor of happy memory, St. Pius X, once the parish priest of the little town of Salzano, was pleased to propose this glorious exemplar of priestly virtues as a model to be imitated by all directors of souls. Recalling these things to mind after the space of so many years, We still give undying thanks to Our Redeemer for the outstanding blessing of having begun Our sacred ministry thus inspired by a powerful and heavenly incentive of virtue.

It is also pleasant to remember that, on the very day of the beatification, the news came to Us that the most distin-

guished prelate Msgr. Giacomo Maria Radini-Tedeschi had been raised to the dignity of the Episcopate. After a few days he summoned Us to his service, and We found him a most affectionate teacher and father. And moreover it was in his company that, in the early part of that same year 1905, We went for the first time in pilgrimage to Ars, the village which has become so famous by reason of the holiness of this parish priest.

Likewise We are convinced that it was not without the special dispensation of God's Providence that, in the year 1925, when We were raised to the episcopal dignity, the Sovereign Pontiff of happy memory, Pius XI, on May 31, canonized the humble parish priest of Ars. In the homily he delivered on that occasion, the Sovereign Pontiff was pleased to speak of "the spare bodily appearance of Jean Baptiste Vianney, the head resplendent with a kind of white crown of long hair, the face gracious and marked by fastings, from which the innocence and holiness of a most humble and gentle soul shone forth in such a way, that, at the first sight of it, multitudes of men were recalled to salutary thoughts." ¹ Shortly thereafter this same Predecessor of Ours, during the year of the fiftieth anniversary of his own priestly ordination, constituted and declared St. Jean Marie Vianney, under whose protection St. Pius X had already placed the pastors of souls in France, the heavenly Patron of all parish priests "in order to further the spiritual good of parish priests everywhere in the world." ²

We have thought it opportune, Venerable Brethren, in this encyclical letter, to recall these acts of Our Predecessors which carry with them so many precious personal memories, since very soon a century will have passed since, this holy man, completely broken by the tremendous labors

of the sacred ministry which he had carried on so effectively over a period of forty years, and famous everywhere for his holiness, died a most pious death on August 4, 1859.

Therefore We give thanks to the most gracious God because, not only has this saint by the splendor of his sanctity on two highly important occasions already aided Our priestly life, but also because now, in this first part of Our Pontificate, We have been given the opportunity of solemnly commemorating this great pastor of souls on the happy occasion of this hundredth anniversary. And you, Venerable Brethren, will easily see that in this letter Our concern and Our thoughts are directed especially to men in Holy Orders, who are certainly Our most beloved sons, and especially those engaged in the pastoral ministry. We wish to have them consider attentively the marvelous example of this holy man who once shared in their own priestly ministry and who now is constituted as their heavenly Patron.

Documents on the Priesthood* There are certainly many doctrinal documents issued by the Sovereign Pontiffs in which the grandeur of the sacerdotal functions is explained to men in Holy Orders, and in which the proper way to approach these sacerdotal functions is pointed out and safeguarded. Among these, to mention the more recent and important documents, We wish in a special way to recommend the Apostolic Exhortation *Haerent animo* of St. Pius X of happy memory,³ which has stimulated Us to a concern for zealous piety since the early years of Our priesthood, the admirable encyclical letter *Ad catholici sacerdotii* issued by Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI,⁴ and finally the Apostolic Exhortation *Menti Nostrae* of Our immediate Predecessor.⁵ We also wish to recommend the

* Paragraph subtitles have been supplied by the translator.

three allocutions of Pope Pius XII in which he, on the occasion of the canonization of St. Pius X, magnificently explained the functions and the nature of the priesthood.⁶ Doubtless, Venerable Brethren, all of these documents are familiar to you. Allow Us then to quote some excerpts from a sermon made public after the death of Our immediate Predecessor, which may constitute the solemn and final exhortation to priestly holiness planned by this great Pontiff. "In the character of Holy Orders God has willed to ratify that eternal covenant of His love in which He loves His priests more than the rest. These priests are therefore bound to repay this outstanding love of God with holiness of life. . . . Consequently the cleric must be considered as a man chosen out of the people, gifted in an entirely special way with heavenly blessings, sharing God's own power, and, to put it briefly, another Christ. . . . He must not live for himself. In the same way it is wrong for him to want his intimates, his friends, or his early fatherland for himself alone. . . . He must ever be completely zealous in charity to all. Moreover his very thoughts, his will, and his perceptions belong not to him but to Jesus Christ, who is his Life."⁷

St. Jean Marie Vianney really calls us and effectively urges us on to these very heights of the priestly life. And thus, so that the priests of our time may strive in this very direction, We are pleased to add Our own exhortation. We know very well the cares and the worries of these priests of our own time. We know the difficulties which today stand in the way of their apostolic activity. Although we are saddened by the fact that the souls of some of them are being tossed about by the waves of this world and are being overcome with weariness, still We know from experience that the faith of a far greater number is firm amidst adversities, and We are aware of the ardent zeal of soul with

which many generously strive for the highest things. But it was to both groups that, at the time of their priestly ordination, Christ the Lord directed these words which are filled with consolation: "Now I shall not call you servants, but friends." ⁸ May this encyclical letter of Ours help all the clergy to nourish and to increase this divine friendship, since the joy and all the fruit of the sacerdotal ministry depend upon this friendship.

Purpose of the Encyclical It is not Our purpose, Venerable Brethren, to touch upon all the individual questions which have reference to priestly life today. But, closely following the example of St. Pius X, "We shall say nothing that is completely unheard of or new to you or to anyone. But what We shall say is what all ought certainly to call to mind." ⁹ For, if the traits of soul of this Saint be properly presented, they can readily point out the way for Us to consider realities which must necessarily exist in every age, but which now have such great importance that, given the opportunity of this hundredth anniversary celebration, We seem to be obliged by Our apostolic office to insist upon them in a special way.

The Catholic Church, which has raised to the honors of canonization this priest "remarkable for his pastoral zeal and for his continuous ardor for prayer and penance," ¹⁰ today, one hundred years after his death, with maternal joy proposes him to be imitated by all the clergy, as a most outstanding model of the priestly ascetical life, of piety and especially of Eucharistic piety, and finally of pastoral zeal.

I: PRIESTLY ASCETICAL LIFE

One cannot start to speak of St. Jean Marie Vianney without automatically bringing to mind the image of a priest singularly outstanding in voluntary bodily mortification

and motivated solely by the love of God and the will to obtain salvation of neighbors. He abstained almost entirely from food and sleep. He performed the most difficult acts of penance, and above all, he practiced self-denial with tremendous courage. It is certain that all Catholics are not bound to adopt this kind of life. Nevertheless divine providence has decreed that there should always be within the Church such pastors of souls who, following the impulse of the Holy Spirit, do not hesitate to enter upon this path, especially since many men turn back from the enticements of error and vice to the right way of life and to virtue particularly as a result of such activity on the part of their priests. The wonderful zeal for devotion, in which St. Jean Vianney, "severe to himself, kindly to others,"¹¹ was so outstanding, fitly and very clearly brings to the mind the important part which priests must attribute to the virtue of penance in the composition of priestly perfection. Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, in order to explain this teaching more fully and in order to make this teaching triumph over the improper doubts urged against it by some men, certainly denied that "the clerical state as such as it proceeds from divine law—by reason of its very nature, or at least by reason of a postulate of that same nature, demands that the evangelical counsels be followed by the men who are in that clerical state."¹² And he rightly concludes the matter with these words: "Therefore the cleric is not bound by divine law to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience."¹³ Yet the man who should presume to infer from this that clerics are less bound than the members of religious communities by the obligation of tending toward evangelical perfection is certainly misrepresenting the true meaning of this same Sovereign Pontiff, who was so concerned with the holiness of the clergy, and is contradicting the constant teaching

of the Church on this subject. The truth is completely opposed to this unwise inference. For the proper performance of the priestly duties "there is required a greater inward holiness than even the state of religion requires."¹⁴ Even though the evangelical counsels are not made mandatory by the force of the clerical state itself for ecclesiastics so that they may be able really to attain this sanctity of life, nevertheless for ecclesiastics as for all the faithful these same counsels constitute the surest way to attain the desired goal of Christian perfection. Furthermore, and this is a great comfort to us, there are many priests today, endowed with generous virtue, who, although belonging to the diocesan clergy, seek aid and support from pious associations approved by the authority of the Church in order that they may be able more easily and more readily to enter upon the way of perfection. They thus show that they understand this teaching.

Ecclesiastics, fully convinced that "the outstanding dignity of the priesthood consists entirely in the imitation of Christ,"¹⁵ ought to be especially attentive to this admonition of the Divine Master. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."¹⁶ It is recalled that "the holy parish priest of Ars often meditated attentively on this statement of Our Lord's, and determined to exemplify it in his conduct."¹⁷ With the aid of divine grace, and influenced by the highest virtue, he actually did what he had willingly determined to do. By his own example through the various works of virtue he still points out the safe path of the priestly ascetical life that should be followed. In this his poverty, chastity, and obedience shine forth in brilliant splendor.

An example of evangelic poverty First take the evidence of his poverty. In this virtue the humble parish priest of

Ars zealously imitated the Patriarch of Assisi, whose teaching he received in the Order of the Franciscan Tertiaries and observed faithfully.¹⁸ He was rich to others, but most poor to himself. He passed through life completely detached from the changing and perishable goods of this world. His soul, completely free from and unattached to such impediments, was fully receptive to those in all kinds of trouble who came in great throngs from everywhere to seek comfort from him. "My secret," he would say, "is very easy to grasp. For it is summed up in these few words: to give everything and to keep nothing for oneself."¹⁹ The effect of this abstinence from external possessions was that he gave constant and most kind care to the poor, especially to the poor of his own parish. He treated them most kindly and he dealt with them "with sincere charity, with the greatest kindness, and even with reverence."²⁰ He warned that the poor should never be despised, since the contempt shown to them was actually manifested to God Himself. When beggars knocked at his door, he used to receive them affectionately, and he greatly rejoiced that he was able to say to them: "I myself live in want. I am one of you."²¹ And toward the end of his life he liked to repeat: "Now I can go forth happy. I possess nothing any more. And now, when it shall please the good God to call me, I shall go ready and prepared."²² Now you can see, Venerable Brethren, how earnestly We should exhort all Our beloved sons who are sharers in the priesthood to meditate on this example of poverty and charity. "We see every day," wrote Pius XI with direct reference to St. Jean Marie Vianney, "how priests of humble life, who by reason of the teaching of the Gospel in no way work for their own interests, always gain marvelous benefits for the Christian people."²³ And the same Supreme Pontiff, when he was writing about the present

condition of human society, addressed this serious admonition to priests as well as to others: "While we see men selling everything for money, and setting a price on everything, may these walk disinterestedly through the allurements of the vices, and, in a holy manner rejecting the unworthy desire of gain, seek the profit, not of money but of souls. May they desire and seek, not their own glory, but God's." ²⁴

These words must be deeply rooted in the soul of every priest. Even though one may possess goods that have come to him legitimately, he should take care that he does not inordinately attach himself to these goods. Let him rather remember that, according to the rules of the Code of Canon Law with respect to ecclesiastical benefices that he is bound by the serious obligation "of giving the superfluity [of the income from the benefice] to the poor or to pious causes." ²⁵ God forbid that anyone should allow to fall upon himself that severe judgment with which long ago the parish priest of Ars reproved his parishioners: "How many are keeping the money they have stored up, while so many of the poor are dying of hunger." ²⁶ It is very well known to Us that in these times many priests live in great want. These priests, when they consider that the honors of canonization have been given to one of their own who willingly gave up all things, and who wished nothing more than to see himself the poorest of all those in his parish, ²⁷ have in this thought a salutary incentive for zealously devoting themselves to the serious cultivation of evangelical poverty. And, if this paternal solicitude of Ours can afford them any comfort, let them know that We greatly rejoice that they generously serve Christ and the Church without striving for their own interests.

But when We are so greatly commending and praising this lofty virtue of poverty, let no one think that We are giving

approval to that unworthy destitution in which ministers of the Lord are sometimes compelled to live either in the cities or in remote villages. On this point St. Bede the Venerable, while he is explaining the Lord's words about abstinence from earthly things, in the course of his timely commentary, disposes of any incompetent interpretation of this teaching in these words: "We must not imagine that the saints are forbidden to keep money for their own use or for that of the poor, since we read that the Lord Himself, for the instruction of His Church, had money bags . . . : but let God not be served for the sake of money and let justice not be forsaken out of fear of poverty."²⁸ Moreover the workman is worthy of his hire.²⁹ And We, moved by the same solicitude as that of Our immediate Predecessor, earnestly beg the faithful readily to obey the admonitions of their Pastors who strive in a praiseworthy manner to see to it that the necessities of daily life are not wanting to their collaborators in the sacred ministry.³⁰

An example of angelic chastity Jean Marie Vianney shone forth as an example by the voluntary mortification of his body just as he did in the way of abstinence from external things. "There is only one way," he said, "to devote oneself to God by the denial of oneself and by the work of penance: that is, by an entire giving of oneself."³¹ And throughout the course of his entire life, the holy Curé of Ars actively followed this axiom in the matter of chastity.

This outstanding example of chastity seems particularly pertinent to the priests of our time, who, as it unfortunately happens in many places, are compelled by the mission entrusted to them to live in the midst of a society which is infected by too little moral restraint and by the influence of evil pleasure. To these men the statement of St. Thomas Aquinas, to the effect that "It is more difficult to live well

in caring for souls, by reason of dangers from the outside,"³² applies very well. It happens that often they find themselves cut off from the society of others, and that they are little understood by the Catholics themselves, for whose salvation they have given their lives. Frequently they are aided and sustained in their endeavors very little by these same Catholics. In this encyclical letter We desire again and again, Venerable Brethren, to exhort all these priests, and especially those most isolated and those exposed to the more serious dangers to this virtue, that their whole life may so to speak reverberate with the splendor of holy chastity, the virtue which St. Pius X rightly called "the most outstanding ornament of our Order."³³ And as far as you are concerned, Venerable Brethren, you must work with all your strength and you must spare no effort to bring it about that the clergy entrusted to you is able to enjoy in their lives and in their sacred ministry, conditions that may favor their generous zeal. In other words, every effort and care must be expended to see to it that the perils of too lonely a life be removed, that whatever is done hastily or imprudently be forbidden by timely admonitions, and finally that both the enticements of idleness and the immoderate dangers of external activity be suppressed. On this subject it is certainly well to recall the wise commands imparted by Our immediate Predecessor in his encyclical letter *Sacra virginitas*.³⁴

It was said of the parish priest of Ars that his face shone with angelic chastity.³⁵ And as a matter of fact whoever meditates on him even today is astounded, not only by the great strength of soul with which this athlete of Christ brought his body into subjection,³⁶ but also by that most effective force of persuasion with which he, with heavenly gentleness, influenced the pious multitudes of pilgrims that

flocked to him to follow in his footsteps. Through his long familiarity with the Sacrament of Penance he had come clearly to know the tremendous ruin brought about by sins of impurity. It was for this reason that this sad statement came from his very heart: "Only for the existence of most innocent souls, who are pleasing to God who is offended by our sins, how many and what bitter punishments would be inflicted on us." And as he was exceptionally well versed in these matters, he used to give heart to his hearers with this advice: "The works of penance abound with such delights and such pleasures that, once they have been tasted, they never escape the soul. . . . To those who seek this path, only the first steps are painful." ³⁷

This type of ascetical life, which is necessary for the conservation of priestly chastity, brings it about that the soul of the priest is not only not confined within the sterile limits of his own self-interest, but also that he be ready and willing to relieve the necessities of his brethren. Hence St. Jean Marie Vianney so beautifully says: "The soul adorned with the virtue of chastity cannot but love others. It has found the very source and origin of love, that is, God."

How many and how great are the benefits that are conferred on human society by men of this kind, who, free from the cares of this world, and completely dedicated to the divine ministry, devote their lives, their thoughts and their forces to the service of their brethren! Of what great profit to the Church are these priests who are primarily solicitous to keep their chastity perfectly! Along with Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI, We consider this chastity as the outstanding glory of the Catholic priesthood, and as "what seems to Us to respond in the most worthy and fitting manner to the counsels and the desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with reference to the souls of

priests.”³⁸ Was not Jean Marie Vianney thinking of that same counsel of divine love when he wrote this profound statement: “The priesthood is the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”?³⁹

The virtue of obedience There are innumerable testimonies on the subject of the virtue of obedience, in which this holy man was likewise outstanding. It can truly be said that he always observed perfectly that fidelity to his ecclesiastical superiors which he had promised at the very reception of his priesthood, and that this obedience forced him to an immolation of his own will that was uninterrupted over the course of forty years. As a matter of fact during every period of his life he most ardently desired to lead a life of retirement in retreat and in silence, and he considered the pastoral duties as a heavy burden imposed upon his shoulders. More than once he tried to free himself from that burden. Yet the dutiful subjection he showed to the Bishop was completely admirable. It is Our pleasure, Venerable Brethren, to cite certain testimonies to that dutiful subjection in this encyclical letter. “From the time he was fifteen years old he was ardently desirous of the solitary life, and when that desire went unfulfilled, he was cut off from every benefit and every consolation which the condition of his life could afford.”⁴⁰ But “God did not allow this intention to be realized. Doubtless in this way God provided that St. Jean Marie Vianney would subject his own will to obedience, and would set the duties of his own office ahead of his own wishes. And in this way his zeal for self-denial never ceased to shine out.”⁴¹ “Jean Marie Vianney carried on his work as the parish priest of Ars so that he might be completely obedient to his superiors, and he remained at this same work until the end of his mortal life.”⁴²

We must remember that this complete obedience to the orders of his superiors was entirely based upon supernatural principles. In this way, by acknowledging ecclesiastical authority and by rightly subjecting himself to it, he gave the obedience of faith to the words which Christ the Lord addressed to His Apostles: "He who hears you, hears me."⁴³ In order that he might be faithfully obedient to his superiors, he habitually coerced his own will, both by taking on the burden of hearing confessions, or by generously doing this kind of work, which produced rich and most salutary results, for the rest of his associates in the apostolate.

Now We propose the form of this most entire obedience as an example to the Order of clerics, completely confident that, when they are sufficiently aware of the force and the beauty of this virtue, they will more zealously desire it. And if, as sometimes happens today, any should presume to doubt the supreme importance of this virtue, let this statement, which ought to be kept firmly in mind, by Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, be their refutation. "The holiness of each individual life and the efficacy of the apostolate are based and sustained, as on a solid foundation, on a constant and faithful dutiful subjection to the sacred hierarchy."⁴⁴ Moreover, as you know very well, Venerable Brethren, Our more recent Predecessors have frequently and seriously warned priests of the greatness of the danger that arises from the increasing distaste for obedience among the clergy, with reference to the authoritative teaching of the Church's doctrine, with reference to the adoption of various methods and types of apostolate, and finally with regard to ecclesiastical discipline.

We do not wish to dwell longer on this point, but rather We think it fitting to exhort all of Our sons who are sharers

in the Catholic priesthood that in their minds they should nourish and increase their awareness of the fact that they are bound to Mother Church by the most intimate of bonds. It is remembered that St. Jean Marie Vianney lived in the Church in such a way as to labor only for it and to burn himself out for it as a straw burned in glowing coals. As men endowed with the priesthood of Jesus Christ, may We be touched and entirely consumed by that flame which arises from the Holy Spirit! We owe ourselves and everything we have to the Church. Let us work daily, therefore, only in its name and by its authority. And, in order that we may properly carry out the missions it has entrusted to us, let us strive to work for it, joined in the bonds of fraternal unity, and in that perfect way in which the Church is to be served.⁴⁵

II: PRAYER AND PRIESTLY EUCCHARISTIC PIETY

As We have said, St. Jean Marie Vianney, who so cultivated the virtue of penance, also held it as certain that “the priest must first of all be dedicated to continual prayer.”⁴⁶ On this point it is well known that, when he had only recently been made the parish priest of a little village in which the Christian life was definitely languishing, he used to pass long and joyous hours of his nightly repose adoring Jesus in the Sacrament of His love. Thus the Sacred Tabernacle seems to have been the source from which he constantly derived heavenly strength by which he nourished and rekindled his own piety and provided for the effectiveness of his apostolic work. Thus, during this holy man’s time, the beautiful words by which Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, described the Christian parish could most fitly be applied to the village of Ars. “The church is the center. The Sacred Tabernacle is the center

of the Church, and beside the Tabernacle is the confessional in which the supernatural life or spiritual health is restored to the Christian people.”⁴⁷

Prayer in the priestly life For the priests of our age, who are sometimes accustomed to over-emphasize the effectiveness of external activity and who so readily give themselves over to an agitation detrimental to their ministry, how opportune and how salutary is this example of continuous prayer given by a man who devoted himself completely to taking care of the necessities of souls! The Curé of Ars has said: “What keeps us priests back from the attainment of holiness is lack of consideration. It displeases us to withdraw our minds from outside things. We do not know what we rightly should do. We have need of intimate reflection, continuous prayer, and intimate union with God.” As we know from the testimonies about his life, he was continually occupied with prayer, from which neither the burden of hearing confessions nor the other pastoral duties could in any way distract him. “When he was most occupied with activities, he never left off speaking with God.”⁴⁸ But let us bring him in to speak, for, when he was discussing the joy or the advantages we derive from prayer, he was endowed with an inexhaustible eloquence. “We are beggars, who have need to beg everything from God.”⁴⁹ “How many can we call back to God by our prayers!”⁵⁰ “The most fervent prayer to God: behold this is the absolute happiness of man here on earth!”⁵¹ He himself enjoyed that happiness in abundance when he turned his mind, enlightened by the heavenly light, to the contemplation of heavenly things, and when he raised his sincere and pure soul from the mystery of the Incarnate Word of God to the heights of the Most Holy Trinity, that he loved with supreme affection. And the throngs of pilgrims who

surrounded him in the church realized that something from the depths of the intimate life of this humble priest was being shown to them when these habitual words of his burst forth most frequently from his burning heart: "To be loved by God, to be joined with God, to walk before God, to live for God: O blessed life, O blessed death." ⁵²

The priest is a man of God We vehemently desire, Venerable Brethren, that the clergy entrusted to your care, instructed by these documents about the life of St. Jean Marie Vianney, may be completely certain that they should employ every resource to be outstanding in zeal for prayer, and that they should be convinced that this is really possible even when they are occupied by an extreme abundance of apostolic works. If this is to be done, however, their lives must be entirely conformed to the norms of the Faith. Jean Marie Vianney accomplished such marvelous things as one completely imbued with that same Faith. A certain colleague of his in the sacred ministry used to say: "O the marvelous faith of this priest! It is so great that it could enrich all the souls in the diocese!" ⁵³

As a matter of fact this constant union with God is brought about and nourished especially by various exercises of sacerdotal piety. The Church, with its wise legislation, has actually prescribed some of the more important of these. Among these we find especially daily meditation, pious visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the rosary, and the diligent examination of conscience.⁵⁴ Priests are bound, by a serious obligation which they have accepted towards the Church, to recite the Holy Office.⁵⁵ Perhaps the reason why some ecclesiastics may be caught up in the whirl of external things, may gradually come to lose some of their holy enthusiasm, and finally, unfortunately, drawn on by the attractions of this earthly life, may find them-

selves in serious danger, is that some of the prescriptions spoken of above may have been neglected, since in this way men find themselves deprived of all spiritual protection. On the contrary, Jean Marie Vianney, "while he was most busily occupied with the salvation of others, still did not neglect his own. He took the greatest care of his own holiness so that he could more readily bring others to holiness."⁵⁶ To use the words of St. Pius X: "Let us hold it as certain and definite . . . that the priest, to uphold his dignity and his position, must be completely dedicated to zeal for prayer. . . . For the priest is bound by an obligation much more strict than that which affects others to obey the command of Christ that we must pray always. It was by reason of that command that Paul so urgently insisted that we be instant in prayer, watchful in it in gratitude, and that we should pray without ceasing."⁵⁷ And moreover We willingly make Our own the words in which Our immediate Predecessor, in the early days of His pontificate, gave as a kind of watchword to priests: "Pray, pray more and more, and more urgently."⁵⁸

Devotion to the Holy Eucharist The zeal for prayer of St. Jean Marie Vianney, who can almost be said to have spent the last thirty years of his life in church, where he was kept by the tremendous number of penitents, was distinguished by a special quality, in that it was directed particularly toward the Eucharist. His ardent piety toward Christ the Lord, hidden behind the Eucharistic veils, almost surpasses belief. "There," he said, "is the One who loves us so much. Why should we not love Him in return?"⁵⁹ He really had a burning charity toward the adorable Sacrament of the Altar. His soul was drawn by an irresistible impulse to the Sacred Tabernacle. He used to teach this method of prayer to his parishioners: "There is no need

for many words in order that we may pray properly. By faith we believe that there, in the sacred Tabernacle, the good God is present. We open our hearts to Him. We rejoice that He has admitted us into His presence. This is the best method of prayer.”⁶⁰ He left nothing undone to stir up the reverence and the love of Catholics toward Christ hidden in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and to urge them to receive Holy Communion. And, by the example of his own piety, he himself showed the way to the rest. “In order that anyone should be convinced of this,” witnesses have reported, “it was enough that they should see him celebrating Mass or even see him genuflecting when he passed in front of the Tabernacle.”⁶¹

The Eucharist and priestly life “The marvelous example of St. Jean Marie Vianney,” as Our immediate Predecessor testifies, “retains all its force even for our times.”⁶² The long and continuous prayer of the priest before the adorable Sacrament of the Altar has a dignity and an efficacy which are such that the priest can obtain them in no other way. There can be no substitute whatever for such prayer. Thus the priest, when he is adoring Christ the Lord and thanking Him, when he is offering satisfaction for his own sins or for the sins of others, or finally when he is praying most fervently to commend to God the matters entrusted to him, burns with a more ardent love for the Divine Redeemer to whom he has promised his fidelity, and for the men in whose favor he is exercising his pastoral care. And from the Eucharistic piety which is ardent, zealous, and effective, it inevitably follows that he will feed and nourish the interior perfection of his own soul, and that the supernatural strength, with which the strong workers for Christ must be equipped, will come abundantly to him in the carrying out of his apostolic responsibility.

Likewise We do not want to pass over the benefits which come forth from this priestly Eucharistic piety to the faithful who are witness of the piety of the priests and are attracted by their example. For, as Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, rightly observed during one of his allocutions to the Roman clergy, "If you really desire that the faithful entrusted to you should pray piously and ardently, you must be an example to them in church, and they must see you praying. The priest who is on his knees before the Sacred Tabernacle in a reverent manner, and who prays attentively to God, is, for the Christian people, an example offering them an incentive and an invitation to rival such a priest in zealous piety." ⁶³ The parish priest assigned to Ars employed these resources when he started out in his apostolic ministry. There can be no doubt whatsoever that these same resources are always most effective, in every circumstance of place and time.

The priesthood and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass Let us never forget that the principal form of Eucharistic prayer is completed and summed up in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. It is Our belief, Venerable Brethren, that we must consider this more carefully, since it has to do with an especially necessary aspect of the priestly life.

It is not our purpose here to explain in any great detail the Church's traditional doctrine about the priesthood and the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Our Predecessors of happy memory, Pius XI and Pius XII, in important and very clear documents, have dealt with these matters. We exhort you to take all care that the priests and the faithful under your direction may have adequate knowledge of these documents. For in this way the inaccurate statements of some men which are made occasionally when there are discus-

sions on these points will vanish, and rash statements will be brought back to right order.

Now, on this very salutary point, We wish in this encyclical letter to show especially for what reason the holy Curé of Ars, who, as is fitting for a hero, was most observant of his priestly duties, is fully worthy to be proposed as an example of outstanding virtue for the directors of souls and is constituted as their heavenly Patron. If it be true that the priest receives the priesthood so that he may serve at the altar and that he has begun the performance of his ministry with the Eucharistic Sacrifice, it follows that the Eucharistic Sacrifice remains for the minister of God, as long as he lives, the principle and the source both of the sanctity which he acquires for himself and of the apostolic activity to which he has given himself. This is very well exemplified in St. Jean Marie Vianney.

For what is the summit of the priestly apostolate, if we now consider the highest point of its activity, other than this: wherever the Church lives, to gather around the altar the people joined together in the bonds of faith, reborn in holy baptism, and cleansed from their sins? Then the priest, using the sacred power he has received, offers the divine Sacrifice in which Christ Jesus renews that one and only immolation which He performed on Calvary for the redemption of the human race and for the glory of the heavenly Father. Then the Christians, uniting together, by the ministry of the priest offer the divine Victim to the sovereign and eternal God and offer themselves "a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God."⁶⁴ And here it is that the people of God, instructed in the teachings and the precepts of the faith, and nourished by the Body of Christ, find what will endow them with supernatural life, advance them in that life, and, if need be, restore unity. Thus it is, more-

over that the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, increases with spiritual growth everywhere on earth throughout the course of the centuries.

And so it is that, since St. Jean Vianney more and more over the course of the years expended himself by dividing his time between the preaching of religious truth and the cleansing of souls from the stain of sin, and because in every act of his sacred ministry he turned himself to God's altar, rightly and properly his life must be called signally priestly and pastoral. There is no doubt that sinners flocked in throngs and most willingly to the church at Ars, attracted by the fame of the holy Curé, while, on the other hand, many priests find it very difficult to gather around them the people who have been entrusted to their direction, so that after the manner of missionaries, they may teach them even the first principles of Christian doctrine. These apostolic labors, which are necessary and which are sometimes difficult, must not prevent the men of God from keeping in mind the matter of supreme importance which they must always have before their eyes, and which St. Jean Vianney followed while he was dedicating himself to the outstanding duties of the apostolic life in a poor country church.

It must especially be kept in mind that the priest, if he seriously intends, wills, and works to be holy, must find his model and his heavenly strength in the Eucharistic Sacrifice he offers. So we are instructed by the exhortation of the *Pontificale Romanum*: "*Agnoscite quod agitis: imitami quod tractatis.*" On this point Our immediate Predecessor of happy memory was pleased to state in his exhortation *Menti Nostrae*: "Just as the entire life of Our Savior was ordered to the sacrifice of Himself, so likewise the life of the priest, who ought to bring out the image of Christ in himself, must be made a pleasing sacrifice with Him, in

Him, and through Him. . . . For this reason he must not only celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice, but even in a certain intimate way live it. For thus he can obtain that heavenly strength by which it comes about that he is entirely transformed and shares in the expiatory life of the Divine Redeemer Himself.”⁶⁵ And he likewise offers this instruction: “Thus it is necessary that the priestly soul should strive to reproduce in itself whatever is accomplished on the altar of sacrifice. For, just as Jesus Christ immolated Himself; so His minister ought to immolate himself together with Him. Just as Jesus Christ expiated the sins of men, so the priest, by the lofty road of the Christian ascetical life, must attain to the purification of himself and of his neighbors.”⁶⁶

The Church is looking at this point of heavenly doctrine when, with its maternal invitation, it urges its sacred ministers to cultivate the ascetical life and to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice most religiously. For is this not the reason why priests have fallen away little by little from the first charity they received in Holy Ordination: that they have not been fully aware of the mutual bond by which the gift of self and the sacrificial offering must be joined to one another? St. Jean Vianney learned this by experience, and he thus stated it: “The reason why priests lose their fervor is that they do not say Mass attentively and piously.” He, whose pious custom it was “to offer himself up in the way of expiation for sinners,”⁶⁷ used to shed tears “when he thought of the unfortunate priests who were devoid of the holiness necessary for their function.”⁶⁸

With paternal exhortation We beg Our most beloved priestly sons to examine their consciences at a definite and stated time as to how they celebrate the Divine Mysteries, as to their attitude and state of mind when they go up to

the altar, and as to the results they strive to acquire for themselves from the Mass. May the solemn centennial of the outstanding and marvelous priest, who, "from the consolation and the happiness of offering the divine Victim,"⁶⁹ drew the most ardent will to dedicate himself, be an incentive to them. And may his prayer, as We are sure it will, obtain for them an abundance of light and strength.

III: PASTORAL ZEAL

Curé of Ars, model of apostolic zeal The outstanding examples of priestly ascetical life and prayer which have already been pointed out to you in this letter, Venerable Brethren, also clearly show from what source St. Jean Marie Vianney drew his pastoral skill, and likewise clearly show the principle of the marvelous heavenly efficacy of his sacred ministry. On this point Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, issued a prudent warning: "Let the priest remember that the highly important ministry entrusted to him will be more fruitful to the extent that he himself is more closely united to Christ, and let him work under the guidance of the spirit of Christ."⁷⁰ Truly indeed the life of the Curé of Ars proves, with a new and glorious demonstration, that supreme rule of apostolic work which is based upon these words of Jesus Christ: "Without me you can do nothing."⁷¹

Certainly We are not going to enumerate here all the marvelous accomplishments of that humble parish priest of a country village who, over a period of thirty years was so besieged by innumerable throngs in the confessional that he was contemptuously described by some as "the rabble-rouser of the nineteenth century."⁷² And We think that We should not treat of all the special methods he employed in

carrying out his ministry. All of these methods cannot always be applicable in our times. On this point, it pleases Us to recall to mind only this: that this Saint stood out as a model of pastoral zeal in his own time in a poor village which still showed the damage to Christian faith and morals brought about by the French Revolution. Before he entered upon his work as pastor he received this command: "You will find little love of God in that parish; see to it that this love of God is stirred up by you." ⁷³ He proved himself an untiring worker for God, prudent and skillful in gaining the youth to himself, and in bringing families to conform to the norms of Christian morality. He was zealously solicitous of the human needs of his flock, close to that flock in the manner of his life, and ready for all kinds of cares and labors for the institution of a Christian school and for missions to the people. All of these things show that St. Jean Marie Vianney, in the little flock assigned to him, carried within himself the image of the true pastor who knows his own sheep, turns them far away from dangers, and guides them powerfully and gently. Unwittingly he praised himself in a sermon, when speaking long ago to the people, he uttered these words: "A good pastor! A pastor who is completely obedient to the commands and the wishes of Christ! Behold the greatest blessing which the good God can confer on a parish." ⁷⁴

Since the example of this holy man bids us to consider three points especially which in force and importance belong to all times, We desire, Venerable Brethren, to call these points to your particular attention.

A shepherd is conscious of responsibilities What touches us first of all is his supreme appreciation of the pastoral office. So great was his humility and so profoundly did he

realize through his faith the price of human salvation, that he could never take up the work of the parochial ministry other than fearfully. He once confided to a certain colleague: "My friend, you do not know what a terrible thing it is for a priest to be transferred from the care of souls to God's tribunal." ⁷⁵ Moreover it is evident, as We have already said, that for a long time he had the strongest desire to retire to a solitude where he would, as he said, weep over his miserable life and properly expiate it. And it is likewise manifest that he was only compelled by obedience and by zeal for the salvation of others to go again into the field of the apostolate which he had left.

But if he felt within himself that the greatness of this burden was so serious that sometimes he seemed as it were to be crushed, the reason must be sought in the fact that there dwelt in his mind so exalted a concept of his office and of the pastoral charge that one could live up to it only by intense fortitude. From the beginning of his pastoral ministry, he thus prayed to God: "My God, grant that the sheep entrusted to me may return to a good life. I am ready to go through whatever it pleases You to have me go through all the days of my life." ⁷⁶ And God graciously granted that fervent prayer. For later he had to confess: "If, when I arrived in the village of Ars, I had known of the sufferings that were destined for me, I would certainly have died then and there." ⁷⁷ Following in the footsteps of the apostolic men of all times, he realized very well that it was through the Cross that he could work most effectively for the salvation of those who had been confided to his care. For their sake and without complaint he suffered calumnies, prejudices, and adversities of every sort. For their sake he willingly bore the most painful vexations of mind and body which accompanied the daily administra-

tion of the Sacrament of Penance which was almost never interrupted over the course of thirty years. For their sake, he, as an athlete of Christ, fought against diabolical enemies. For their sake, finally, he brought his body into subjection by voluntary mortification. On this point there is his answer to that priest who had complained to him that his own apostolic zeal had brought forth no fruits: "Have you prayed to God? Have you wept? Have you cried out in pain? Have you sighed? Have you also used fasting, going without proper sleep, and sleeping on the bare floor? Until you have done these things, do not imagine that you have made every effort." ⁷⁸

Our mind turns again to the priests who are in charge of souls, and We earnestly beg them to perceive the force that is to be found in these serious words. Let every one of them, under the guidance of that supernatural prudence to which all our actions must be conformed, take thought about the manner of his own life and see whether or not it be such as the pastoral care entrusted to him demands. With confidence that the gifts of the merciful God will never be wanting to human weakness, let these priests consider within themselves the burdens and the duties they have assumed, looking at St. Jean Marie Vianney as they would look in a mirror. That holy man used to complain: "The great calamity comes to us parish priests when the soul is sunk in idleness and in sloth." In these words he was referring to the harmful attitude of those pastors who are not at all affected by the fact that so many of the sheep entrusted to them are soiled in the slavery of sin. Actually, if they want to imitate the Curé of Ars, who was "convinced that we must love men if we are going to benefit them," ⁷⁹ these same priests should inquire within themselves about the kind of charity with which they love those

whose care God has entrusted to them and for whom Christ died.

Undoubtedly the fact that sometimes the efforts of the most holy men are ineffective must be attributed to human freedom and likewise to occurrences which do not depend on human freedom at all. Nevertheless the priest must remember that, in the hidden designs of Divine Providence, the eternal fate of very many men is intimately connected with his pastoral skill and with the example of his priestly life. Is not the force of this thought such as to move the slothful in a salutary way, and to stir up the zealous to more fervent efforts?

Tireless preacher and catechist Since it is recalled that "he was at all times alert to the needs of souls,"⁸⁰ St. Jean Marie Vianney, as a good pastor, excelled also in this: that he abundantly supplied the nourishment of Christian truth to his parishioners. As a matter of fact throughout his entire life he engaged in preaching and in the teaching of the catechism.

All know the tremendous and constant effort he had to make in order to be equal to the performance of this task, which the Council of Trent has designated as the first and the most important work. For the course of studies which he took up at what was already an advanced age was very difficult for him, and the first sermons he preached to his people cost him very many nights without sleep. How much can teachers of the Word find in this to imitate! As a matter of fact there are some who, abandoning almost all regard for studies, far too readily seek to find in his meager store of erudition a bad excuse for themselves. Let them rather propose to themselves as an example the vigorous constancy by which the Curé of Ars rendered himself competent to perform this exalted ministry with the equipment

of his own talents. These talents, incidentally, were not as meager as the popular opinion would have it, since he was endowed with keenness of mind and with correct judgment.⁸¹

Of course men in sacred orders ought to acquire for themselves the cognizance of human affairs and the store of sacred doctrine that are proportionate to their talent and to their position. But would that the pastors of souls might expend in this work as much energy as the Curé of Ars spent in order to learn things which were hard and difficult, in order to strengthen his memory by exercising it, and especially in order to derive knowledge from the Lord's Cross, which is the greatest of books. So it was that his own Bishop answered certain critics of his with the statement: "I do not know whether or not he is learned. Still he shines with heavenly enlightenment."⁸²

Thus rightly and properly Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, did not hesitate to propose this humble country parish priest as a model for the preachers of Rome. "The holy Curé of Ars was certainly not endowed with an innate oratorical talent like that possessed by Segneri and Bossuet. Yet that enlightenment dwelt in his mind as something living, clear, and profound, was manifested in the sound of his voice, shone forth in the look of his eyes, and presented to the thought and the apprehension of his hearers concepts and illustrations that were apt and fitting and figures of speech that were so pleasant that they would have compelled the admiration even of St. Francis of Sales. Such are the preachers who attract the souls of the faithful to themselves. The man who is filled with Christ will, without difficulty, find means and ways of joining others to Christ."⁸³ In these words the Curé of Ars is marvelously well described as a teacher of the catechism and as a

preacher. And when, towards the end of his earthly life, his over-tired voice could not reach his hearers, he used to convert the faithful who crowded around his pulpit to a life of virtue by his ardent look, by his tears, by the sighs that manifested his love for God, and by the evidences of the acute suffering he endured whenever even the thought of sin came into his mind. How could all these people fail to be powerfully moved, when a life of this kind, entirely given over to God, was so clearly evident there before them?

Up until his most pious death St. Jean Marie Vianney was most observant of his duty of teaching, both the faithful confided to his care and the pilgrims who crowded into his church, of denouncing "in season and out of season,"⁸⁴ all evils, under whatever appearance they might be hiding, and especially of lifting souls high up to God, for "he preferred to point out the beauties of virtue rather than the ugliness of vice."⁸⁵ For this humble priest understood well the dignity and the greatness inherent in the office of teaching the word of God. He used to say: "Our Lord, who is Truth itself, esteems His word no less than His Body."

Thus it is easily understood that Our Predecessors were delighted to point to such an example for the directors of the Christian people to imitate. For it is very important indeed that the clergy carry out their work of teaching with zealous diligence. On this point St. Pius X says: "It is imperative to insist upon and to urge this one thing: no priest is bound to any duty more important than this: no priest is bound by any obligation more imperative than this."⁸⁶ This warning, which Our Predecessors have repeated with firm constancy over and over again, and which is inserted into the prescriptions of the Code of Canon

Law,⁸⁷ We now bring to your attention again, Venerable Brethren, on this solemn occasion of the centennial of the holy catechist and preacher of Ars. Hence by Our praise We encourage the efforts that are being made, under your initiative and guidance, in a circumspect and prudent way, in many places, in order that religious instruction which must be properly imparted to the young and to adults in many ways and in a manner in keeping with the needs of the individual places, may be improved. These tentatives are certainly useful, but, while this centennial is being observed, God wills that the marvelous force of the irresistible apostolic spirit of this priest should be shown in a new light. By his words and by the works of his life he gave testimony to Christ nailed to the Cross: “not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in showing of the Spirit and power.”⁸⁸

Valiant apostle of the confessional Now it remains for Us to enter more into detail on the subject of the pastoral ministry of St. Jean Marie Vianney, by pointing out the fact that for a long period of his life this ministry was a continual martyrdom to him, and that, in the performance of it, the administration of the Sacrament of Penance was outstanding in a particularly praiseworthy manner and produced most abundant and salutary results. “Daily for almost fifteen hours he patiently listened to people making their confessions. He started this work very early in the morning and kept it up until far into the night.”⁸⁹ When, five days before his death, he was broken by weariness, and the strength to continue this was lacking, his last penitents came to him while he was lying on the bed on which he was about to die. It is said that the number of pilgrims who strove to see him each year toward the end of his life is estimated at eighty thousand.⁹⁰

It is almost impossible to realize the pains, the inconveniences, and the bodily sufferings of this man who sat in the confessional hearing confessions for such an interminable length of time, even when he was already weakened by fasting, mortifications, infirmities, vigils, and lack of sleep. But he was especially troubled by the anguishes of soul that never ceased to afflict him. Listen to these words of sorrow. He used to say: "So many impious offenses are being committed against God that we are almost moved to pray for the end of the world! . . . One must come to Ars to realize the gravity and the almost infinite multitude of sins. . . . Unfortunately, we do not know what is to be done. We believe that all we can do is to mourn and to pray to God." And moreover this holy man could add that he had taken a great part of the expiation of sins upon himself. For he thus answered those who consulted him on this matter: "I impose only a small burden of penance on those who make a good confession. The rest I take on myself."⁹¹

Certainly St. Jean Marie Vianney always kept those whom he called "the poor sinners" before his eyes and in his mind, moved by the hope that he would sometime see them be converted to God and weeping because of the sins they had committed. All his cares and his thoughts were directed to this end. To this same end was likewise ordered the work to which he devoted all his time and almost all his strength.⁹² By his experience, and through the use of the sacred tribunal of penance, in which he gave absolution, he understood how much malice there is in offenses against God and how savage a devastation sin brings into the souls of men. He used to depict this in the darkest colors. He said: "If we, endowed with faith as we are, could fully perceive a soul soiled by mortal sin, we would die at once of fear."⁹³

But the punishments of hell to which souls in the state of sin are liable had less effect in increasing the force of his sorrow and of his words than the anguish he felt by reason of the fact that the divine love was either forgotten or neglected, or offended. The viciousness of sin and the ungrateful forgetfulness of the great goodness of God made him weep bitterly. "My friend," he used to say, "I am weeping because you do not weep." ⁹⁴ But on the contrary, with what kindness did he take special care that souls who repented their sins should be lifted up to good hope! He spared no effort to show himself to these people as the minister of divine mercy, which, to use his own words, "like a raging torrent draws all souls along with it." ⁹⁵ And he pulsed with a more than maternal charity "since God gives forgiveness more quickly than a mother snatches her child from the fire." ⁹⁶

Stirred up by the example of the Curé of Ars, let all directors of souls see to it that they devote themselves generously and equipped with the proper knowledge to this duty of such great importance, since it is here particularly that the divine mercy emerges victorious over human malice, and here that, freed from their sins, men are reconciled with God. These same men should also remember that "with very serious words" Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, reprovved the opinion of those who belittled the frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance when it is a matter of venial sins. For the Sovereign Pontiff said: "For making a progress which is daily more vital along the path of virtue, We wish especially to recommend that pious use of frequent confession, which has been introduced by the Church not without the impulse of the Holy Spirit." ⁹⁷ And likewise We are completely confident that priests, before others, will faithfully obey the prescriptions of Canon Law ⁹⁸

which command them piously and at definite times to receive themselves the Sacrament of Penance which is so necessary for the attainment of holiness. We are also confident that, as is fitting, they may have the highest esteem for and make use of those urgent exhortations which this same Predecessor of Ours more than once imparted "with sorrowful soul." 99

Conclusion Now that this encyclical letter of Ours is coming to an end, We wish to assure you, Venerable Brethren, that We have a most pleasant hope that this centennial celebration, with the help of God's grace, may keenly sharpen the zeal of all priests for performing their sacred ministry with a more fervent enthusiasm, and especially, "with regard to the first duty of priests, which is the duty of working toward their own sanctification." 100

When, from this height of the Supreme Pontificate, to which We have been raised by the hidden decree of God's Providence, We come to think of what souls are hoping and waiting for, or of the great number of regions of the world not yet enlightened by the light of the Gospel, or finally of the innumerable needs of the Christian people, the image of the priest comes always before Our eyes. If a priest be lacking, or if his daily work should cease, what profit would there be in all the apostolic works that have been begun, even those which seem particularly well adapted to this present time? What would be accomplished even by those laymen who generously and enthusiastically co-operate in the apostolate? Therefore We do not hesitate to call upon all these priests whom We love so much and in whom the Church places such great hope, to call upon these priests in the name of Jesus Christ and with fatherly soul to accomplish with supreme fidelity what is demanded of them by the importance of their ecclesiastical dignity. To this appeal

of Ours these wise words of St. Pius X add force: "For the promotion of the kingdom of Jesus' Christ in the world, nothing is more necessary than the holiness of ecclesiastics, that they may give leadership to the faithful by example, by words, and by teaching."¹⁰¹ This agrees with what St. Jean Marie Vianney said in the presence of his Bishop: "If you want the entire diocese to be converted to God, then all the parish priests must become saints."

But to you, Venerable Brethren, upon whom the heavy responsibility for the holiness of your clergy is particularly incumbent, We wish in a special way to commend these most beloved sons of Ours, that you may be solicitous against the difficulties, which are sometimes serious, by which their lives or their works are affected. What can a Bishop not accomplish who has a real love for the clergy entrusted to his watchfulness, who has the clergy attached to him, who really knows them, takes genuine care of them, and governs them strongly and paternally? If the pastoral solicitude of the whole diocese is incumbent on you, an entirely special care must be devoted to these men whom you have constituted in Sacred Orders, as the immediate helpers in your work, and whom you realize are closely associated with yourselves in such holy bonds.

Given the opportunity of this centennial celebration, We wish also to direct a paternal exhortation to all the faithful, that they may pray constantly to God for their priests, and that they may contribute, in the measure in which each is able towards the holiness of the priests. Today those who are outstanding in ardent piety turn their eyes and their minds, with great hope and expectation, to the priest. At a time when the domination of money, and the attractions of the senses, and an over-exalted esteem for technical studies are everywhere spread abroad, they want to look

upon him as a man who speaks in the name of God, who is animated by firm faith, and who, as it were without thought of himself, is on fire with fervent charity. Let all of these be mindful of the fact that they can greatly help priests to attain to this high goal if they now show proper reverence for the priestly dignity, if they look with right judgment on the pastoral work and its difficulties, and finally if they help in this work with a more effective zeal.

We could not do other than to turn an especially paternal regard towards the youth, for whom We have an especially intense charity, and in whose accomplishments the Church places the hope of the future. The harvest indeed is great, but the workers are few.¹⁰² In how many countries do heralds of the truth of the Gospel, worn out by their labors, await with the most intense longing those who can take their places! There are not lacking peoples who languish miserably for a lack of heavenly, rather than of earthly, nourishment. Who will spread for them the heavenly banquet of life and of truth? We are entirely confident that the youths of our time will generously answer the invitation of the Divine Master to carry on this necessary work as youths did in times gone by.

Now priests often find themselves in difficult situations. There is no reason to be astonished at this, for those who hate the Church attack the priests by troubling them and by laying traps for them. As the Curé of Ars himself said, those who want to overthrow religion start out by hating the priest.

But still, even in the midst of these most serious difficulties, a high and genuine happiness comes to priests who are burning with zeal for religion from their awareness of their own function, since they realize that they have been called

by the Divine Saviour to give their enthusiastic co-operation in a most holy work, which has to do with the redemption of men's souls and with the increase of Christ's Mystical Body. Let Christian families esteem it a high privilege to give priests to the Church, and thus they may joyously and gratefully offer their sons for the sacred ministry.

But since this exhortation of Ours also strongly affects your own souls, Venerable Brethren, it is unnecessary to dwell on it any longer. For We are certain that you are completely aware of this solicitude of Our soul and of its persuasive force, and that you will take pains to share in it. But in the meantime, We commit to the prayer of St. Jean Marie Vianney this highly important affair with which the salvation of innumerable men is so closely bound up.

We turn Our regard to the immaculately conceived Mother of God. Shortly before the holy Curé of Ars finished the long course of his life which was freighted with heavenly merits, she appeared in another part of France to an innocent and humble girl, in order that through her, with maternal exhortation, she might call men to zeal for prayer and for Christian penance. This revered voice, still affecting men after the passing of a hundred years, resounds far and wide almost everywhere. And truly the deeds and the words of this priest who has been canonized, whose hundredth anniversary we are celebrating, illumined with a kind of previous and heavenly light those same heavenly truths which, in the Grotto of Lourdes, were revealed to that innocent girl. For he himself who was greatly devoted to the immaculately conceived Virgin Mother of God, in the year 1836 dedicated his parish church to Mary conceived without sin. And it was with supreme piety and joy that, in 1854 he reverently received the Catholic dogma in which this truth was infallibly defined.¹⁰³

Therefore it is with the highest gratitude to God that we join together these two centennials, the one at Lourdes and the other at Ars, which, in the way in which they follow one another greatly ennoble that nation so dear to Us which glories in the fact that these two holy places are within her boundaries. Mindful of so many benefits, and confident that new blessings are going to come to Us and to the universal Church, let us borrow from the holy Curé of Ars the invocation which came so frequently from his lips: "Blessed be the most holy and Immaculate Conception of the most blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. May all nations praise, and may all lands invoke and glorify your Immaculate Heart!" ¹⁰⁴

Completely confident that this centennial of St. Jean Marie Vianney will everywhere stir up the zeal both of priests and of those who are called by God's grace to the priesthood, and likewise that it will bring all the faithful to be more solicitous in advancing what pertains to the life and the functions of priests, to each and every one of them, and to you, Venerable Brethren first of all, in fervent charity We impart the Apostolic Benediction to draw down the grace of heaven, and as a pledge of our benevolence.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, August 1, 1959, the first year of Our Pontificate.

Pope John XXIII.

NOTES

- 1 *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XVII (1925), 224. (Future references to this periodical will designate it simply as *AAS*.)
- 2 *Anno iubilari*, in *AAS*, XXI (1929), 313.
- 3 Cf. *Acta Pii X*, IV, 237-64.
- 4 Cf. *AAS*, XXVIII (1936), 5-53.
- 5 Cf. *AAS*, XLII (1950), 357-402.
- 6 Cf. *AAS*, XLVI (1954), 313-17; 666-77.
- 7 *L'Osservatore Romano*, for Oct. 17, 1958.
- 8 Cf. the *Pontificale Romanum*, and *John*, 15:15.
- 9 *Haerent animo*, *Acta Pii X*, IV, 238.
- 10 *Oratio* in the Mass for the Feast of St. Jean Vianney.
- 11 *The Processes of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the Secret Archives of the Vatican*, v. 227, 196. Subsequent references to one of these volumes will designate it as *ASV*.
- 12 *Annus sacer*, in *AAS*, XLIII (1951), 29.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, IIa-IIae, q. 184, art. 8.
- 15 *AAS*, XLV (1953), 288.
- 16 *Matt.*, 16:24.
- 17 *ASV*, v. 227, 92.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 20 *ASV*, v. 3897, 510.
- 21 *ASV*, v. 227, 334.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 305.
- 23 *Divini Redemptoris*, in *AAS*, XXIX (1937), 99.
- 24 *Ad catholici sacerdotii*, in *AAS*, XXVIII (1936), 28.
- 25 *Canon* 1473.
- 26 *Sermons du B. Jean B. M. Vianney*, I, 364.
- 27 Cf. *ASV*, v. 227, 91.
- 28 *Lucae Evangelium Expositio*, c. 12, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, XCII, 494 f.
- 29 Cf. *Luke*, 10:7.
- 30 *Menti Nostrae*, in *AAS*, XLII (1950), 697 ff.
- 31 Cf. *ASV*, v. 227, 91.
- 32 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, *loc. cit.*
- 33 *Haerent animo*, *Acta Pii X*, IV, 260.
- 34 Cf. *AAS*, XLVI (1954), 161-91.
- 35 Cf. *ASV*, v. 3897, 536.
- 36 Cf. *I Cor.*, 9:27.
- 37 Cf. *ASV*, v. 3897, 304.
- 38 *Ad catholici sacerdotii*, in *AAS*, XXVIII (1936), 28.
- 39 Cf. *ASV*, v. 227, 29.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 42 *ASV*, v. 3895, 153.
- 43 *Luke*, 10:16.
- 44 *In auspicando*, in *AAS*, XI (1948), 375.
- 45 *ASV*, v. 227, 136.

- 46 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 47 *Discorsi e Radiomessagi di S. S. Pio XII*, XIV, 452.
- 48 *ASV*, v. 227, 131.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 1100.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 29.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 976.
- 54 Cf. *canon* 125.
- 55 Cf. *canon* 135.
- 56 *ASV*, v. 227, 36.
- 57 *Haerent animo*, in the *Acta Pii X*, IV, 248 f.
- 58 *AAS*, XXXI (1939), 249.
- 59 *ASV*, v. 227, 1103.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 459.
- 62 *AAS*, XLVIII (1956), 579.
- 63 *AAS*, XXXV (1943), 114f.
- 64 *Rom.*, 12:1.
- 65 *Menti Nostrae*, in *AAS*, XLII (1950), 666 f.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 667 f.
- 67 *ASV*, v. 227, 319.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 667 f.
- 70 *Menti Nostrae*, in *AAS*, XLII (1950), 676.
- 71 *John*, 25:15.
- 72 *ASV*, v. 227, 629.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 74 *Sermons du B. Jean B. M. Vianney*, II, 86.
- 75 *ASV*, v. 227, 1210.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 991.
- 78 *Ibid.*
- 79 *Ibid.*, 1002.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 580.
- 81 *ASV*, v. 3897, 444.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 272.
- 83 *AAS*, XXXVIII (1946), 186.
- 84 *II Tim.*, 4:2.
- 85 *ASV*, v. 227, 185.
- 86 *Acerbo nimis*, in the *Acta Pii X*, II, 75.
- 87 *Canons* 1330 ff.
- 88 *I Cor.*, 2:4.
- 89 *ASV*, v. 227, 18.
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 *Ibid.*, 1018.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 290.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 999.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 978.
- 96 *ASV*, v. 3900, 1554.
- 97 *Mystici Corporis Christi*, in *AAS*, XXXV (1943), 235.
- 98 *Canon* 125, § 1.
- 99 *Mystici Corporis Christi*, in *AAS*, XXXV (1943); 235; *Mediator Dei*, in *AAS*, XXXIX (1947), 585; and in *Menti Nostrae*, *AAS*, XLII (1950), 674.
- 100 *Menti Nostrae*, *AAS*, XLII (1950), 677.
- 101 *La ristorazione*, in the *Acta Pii X*, I, 257.
- 102 Cf. *Matt.*, 9:37.
- 103 *ASV*, v. 227, 90.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 1021.

