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**APOSTOLIC LETTER**

**ON OFFERING THE DAILY READING OF THE  
BREVARY FOR THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL**

**SACRAE LAUDIS**

**HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN XXIII**

**January 6, 1962**



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# APOSTOLIC LETTER



*Translation of an Apostolic Letter of January 6, 1962 urging priests of the world to offer the reading of the Breviary for the intentions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.*

Venerable Brothers and beloved sons:

It is only natural that the chorus of praise and of thanksgiving, addressed to God in every part of the Catholic world for the convocation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, should not only continue, but give rise to pulsations of a constantly more intense fervor of Christian life.

The echo of general satisfaction, which reaches even here close to the Tomb of St. Peter, invites Us, therefore, to seek timely means to unite more closely all souls in preparation for the great event. This will correspond all the more perfectly to its ends and to its universal expectation the more it will foster a collective, decisive and harmonious effort for general sanctification, in addition to the strengthening of the Catholic Faith and the revising of Church legislation in conformity with present day conditions.

## ***First an Invitation to the Students for the Priesthood***

The first form of cooperation for the success that we expect is prayer. Above all priestly prayer which immediately gives tone and fervor to the spiritual elevation of all Christian people.

This is why, as early as Monday, September 12, 1960, the liturgical day dedicated to the Most Blessed Name of Mary, at the time of Our happy and exceptional country visit at Rocantica (summer home) of the students of the Roman Semi-

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nary—so dear among the memories of Our priestly beginnings—We welcome the inspiration of giving to those beloved young men a task of universal prayer.

This would gather together every day in perfect communion the students for the priesthood, that they might prepare through a life of intense and fervent piety for the great event of the council, that it may correspond to the expectations of the whole of Catholicism and of the entire world.

This task<sup>1</sup> was welcomed with general satisfaction. From the solitude of the Sabine Hills it spanned all distances, it reached the young seminarians of all languages and of all nations, like the igniting of a sacred fire of preparation for the dear and holy joys of that new priesthood, to which will be reserved the first application of the wise decisions of the future council.

Oh! blessed and perennial youth who, under the auspices of the holy name of Mary, and as though guided by her, prepare the shining legions for the beneficial apostolate of the Church of the future!

### *The Council, a New Epiphany*

The recent feast of Christmas brought us close during those holy days not only to the Mother but also to her spouse, dear St. Joseph, both moving together on the road of Bethlehem toward the fulfillment of the great mystery of the “Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.”<sup>2</sup> Who, more than the priest, is worthy of familiarizing himself with St. Joseph, to whom was granted the joy not only of seeing and hearing God, but of carrying, kissing, dressing and guarding Him?<sup>3</sup>

On the occasion of his feast, therefore, on March 19, of last year, it was also to Him that We wished to entrust the inf-

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<sup>1</sup>cfr. *Discourses, Messages, Talks of the Holy Father John XXIII*, II, pp. 466-472.

<sup>2</sup>*John* 1, 14.

<sup>3</sup>cfr. *Roman Missal*, Preparation for Mass.

fable task of Patron of the Council<sup>4</sup>, as he has already been declared Patron of the Universal Church on the occasion of the First Vatican Council of December 8, 1869.

### *Now We Are at the Epiphany of The Lord*

Behold, around Jesus at Bethlehem, the scene of the Magi. Oh, what a spectacle! They hastened from the East, preceded and guided to their great joy by a wonderful star.

The Evangelist St. Matthew describes them to us with delightful simplicity of words and color. As soon as they arrived, they knelt in adoration before the Child Jesus as a sign of their feelings and offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.<sup>5</sup>

Picture these unexpected visitors of high social rank, as are the Magi, chosen flowers for their personal dignity, for their open and alert intelligence, performing sacred and distinct representative functions. It is spontaneous and beautiful for Our spirit to contemplate the enchanting spectacle of all the components of the Catholic priesthood—bishops, prelates, priests of the diocesan and religious clergy—all moved by the same star to surround the same Jesus with homage, Who is alive through the centuries at the center of His glorious and immortal Church.

Does it not seem that prior to being a new and great Pentecost the ecumenical council intends to be a real and new Epiphany, one of many, but one of the most solemn manifestations that have been repeated and are repeated throughout history?

The act of these three strange and fortunate figures, worshipping in mystical prayer and offering the precious gifts of their lands to the newborn Saviour in the name of the whole world is very significant.

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<sup>4</sup>Apostolic Letter "*Le vccì*", March 19, 1961, A.A.S. LIII (1961) pp. 205-213).

<sup>5</sup>*Matthew* 2, 1, 12.

## *Paternal Appeal to the Entire Catholic Clergy*

Venerable Brothers and beloved sons!

Allow Us to tell you that it is from this (picture) that We derive the inspiration of suggesting to all of you who are priests of the Catholic Church to repeat the twofold act of adoration and of offering every day of this year, which begins now, of more intense spiritual preparation for the council.

We have thought, therefore, of calling the attention of the Catholic clergy, which amounts to saying all those people who belong to the priestly order of every country, of every rite, of every language, to their most eminent duty of praying frequently for the council.

The Holy Sacrifice of the daily Mass is above every form of liturgical supplication. But nothing is more precious for a priest than the recitation of the praise of God, that is the Divine Office.

We consider it pertinent to point out to all who are anointed by the Lord that they are obliged to recite these prayers as a special form of devotion in preparation for the council. Most intense care is required in the recitation of the daily Divine Office, whether it be said under splendid or modest vaults of a church or chapel, or recited in choir—which is the most perfect form of supplication—or in the privacy of an individual's recollection, for it is always offered as a sacrifice of praise in the name of the universal Church.

Why, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, would you not all, with generous hearts, join in applying, during this new year, this service of prayer which we have recommended to the end that God may look with gracious favor upon this great event which Christians await with gladsome expectation? Why would not all of you, We say, make this intention, from the newly ordained subdeacon, who, with devotion and zeal, has just begun to taste the delights of the Divine Office and to experience in its recitation a heart-filling joy, to the venerable old man who, while he pours out his prayers, enjoys a soothing peace as if he were already admitted to that heavenly blessedness reserved for him in the Assembly of the Saints?



Every priest is, in fact, not only "steward of the mysteries of God" as he is in the Holy Mass<sup>6</sup>, but he is also mediator between God and men. He is like Christ himself, and in His likeness "taken from among men, he is appointed for men in the things pertaining to God."<sup>7</sup>

As St. John Chrysostom explains excellently: "The priest is in the center between God and men: he brings to us the goods that come from there and to there he takes our prayers."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Divine Office, a Most Lofty Priestly Prayer*

This reminder of Ours of the Divine Office as a characteristic form of great and most lofty priestly prayer (is) to obtain graces and the gifts which the whole world expects from the forthcoming ecumenical council. It leads Us again, like an admirable reminder, to the characteristics with which the Lord Jesus wished to mark His Church, through which it is and remains after 20 centuries of foundation, one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. (It is) always vibrant and vigorous, and intensely anxious that the different Christian confessions, which through the centuries of history have lived and still live separated from her, should be reunited with her to enjoy the same benefits.

The daily Breviary of the priest, then, recited according to the variety of rites, of languages, of dioceses, or of religious families remains always the great divine poem offered for the song of humanity, redeemed by Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, Incarnate "of the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary" and made true Man, crucified and risen.

The devout turning of the pages of this poem is joy for the mind; a daily teaching for life; relief and comfort among the difficulties and weariness of human vicissitudes and temptations and a reconfirmed certainty of future joys.

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<sup>6</sup>1 *Corinthians* 4, 1.

<sup>7</sup>*Hebrews* 5, 1: cfr. 8, 6; 9, 15; 12, 24; 1 *Timothy* 2, 5.

<sup>8</sup>Homily, 5 in *Isaiam*, PG, LVI, col. 131.

It is a great joy for every priest to feel himself, when reciting the Divine Office, as though raised up tenderly in that atmosphere of catholicity, that is, of universality which breathes from its pages, where everything shines and sings.

With the psalms—which are true joy, a wise admonition and gentle repose of the spirit—there are intertwined, in fact, passages of the other books of the Old Testament, and, together with these, the very rich teaching of the four evangelical texts, the incomparable sublimity of the Pauline epistles and the other New Testament writers.

All this is contained in the daily Breviary, an inexhausted and inexhaustible source of light and grace. It is indeed from this that our Second Vatican Ecumenical Council—through the valuable and steadfast work of the various preparatory commissions—is already drawing substantial elements of very pure doctrine and of wise provisions of ecclesiastic teaching, in studied and enlightened correspondence with the modern and understandable demands of our times and places.

It can well be said, therefore, that we all feel ourselves at the beginning of a new epoch, which is based on loyalty to the ancient heritage, which opens itself to the marvels of real spiritual progress. And this (new epoch) can expect dignity, prosperity and blessing only from Christ, glorious and immortal King of centuries and peoples.

### ***Sanctified Recitation of the Breviary for the Historical Event of the Church***

Venerable Brothers and beloved sons!

Drawing toward the end of this confident invitation for the religious fervor of each priestly soul, in whatever part of the world he may live, and in order that the contribution of each day may be beneficial to the good success of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, with loving eyes We contemplate once again the episode of the adoration of the Holy Magi.

We like to consider today's mystery of the Epiphany not only in the gesture of faith and of love of those worthy repre-



sentatives of all the nations of the world but particularly in the offering of their gifts.

They are precious gifts in themselves, but still more precious because of their significance: gold, charity; incense, prayer; myrrh, mortification.

The sanctified recitation of the priestly Breviary for the propitiation of graces for the council could not be expressed better than by this threefold homage. Reflect well on this.

In the Divine Office everything is a reminder, a contemplation, a practice of charity, a perfume of mystical incense, a constant fragrance of prayer. Good works, then, (arise) of the priestly ministry, sometimes difficult, mortifying, painful. Oh! What a chosen goal! But this is also in the odor of tenderness.

We trust that the priests of the whole world will welcome willingly Our paternal invitation regarding this form of their cooperation for the success of the great council, which is awaited with such great expectation by so many souls and by the whole world.

We also wish to say for your mutual encouragement that, in this pious manifestation of priestly fervor, the humble Pastor of the universal Church intends to feel himself united with all his priests, who are found in every land and on all the seas.

The Pope always dedicates the very first hours of the morning to the quiet recitation of his Breviary which, considered as a guide to prayer in the variety of its expressions, can well be called the Breviary of the universal Church.

We wish to end Our exhortation with a passage from the Apocalypse, that marvelous book of comforts, which can offer substantial food for meditation, especially for priests. In it is described something which is like a divine liturgy in Heaven:

“And another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he might offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne. And with the prayers of the saints there went up before God from the angel’s

hand the smoke of the incense. And the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it down upon the earth. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

This is a moving image of the influence which the prayers of the saints, which are those of the Church, have (had) through the goodness and mercy of God on the course of events and of human history.

Confidence in this supernatural efficaciousness of the prayer of the Church, and in a special way of the Divine Office, has urged Us to request by means of this exhortation, of all those people who recite it through the official mission received from the Church, to offer it particularly for the happy success of the council, that, seeking out the signs of the most ardent youth of the Church, it may return due splendor to its face.

“In this way there will be given to the world an admirable spectacle of truth, of unity and of charity; and those people who are separated from this Apostolic See will derive from this spectacle a tender invitation to seek and achieve that unity which Christ implored with ardent prayer.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***In Perfect Union with the Supreme Pontiff***

We have spoken to you with a heart that is pleased to seek you every day wherever you may be, spread throughout the world. Let Us feel now the joy of feeling Ourselves always close to you, in a mutual heartbeat of faith, of universal charity, while We cherish the very sweet hope that you, together with Us, will keep the ecumenical council in your prayers, now, during the months of preparation and likewise still more during the days of its solemn celebration.

And in order that this union of hearts may find its permanent expression also in a common formula of prayer, We suggest this prayer to you for recitation before (reading) the Breviary.

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<sup>9</sup>Apoc. 8, 3-5; cfr. 5, 8.

<sup>10</sup>Encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*, A.A.S., 51, 1959, p. 511.

*“Acceptum tibi sit, Domine Deus, sacrificium laudis, quod divinae maiestati tuae offero pro felici exitu Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani secundi, et praesta, ut quod simul cum Pontifice nostro Ioanne suppliciter a te petimus, per misericordiam tuam efficaciter consequamur. Amen.” \**

May We be allowed to add, together with this prayer, a thought that We believe can be a subject of useful meditation for priests?

It is a common and very dear teaching in the Church that the custody of every baptized human is entrusted to a guardian angel. Let us entrust to this heavenly guardian angel the special task of a more gracious vigilance over us in the recitation of the daily Divine Office, that this duty performed worthily, attentively and devoutly, may be pleasing to God, that it may be meritorious for ourselves and edifying for souls.

Finally, trusting that you, venerable Brothers and beloved sons, may willingly welcome this exhortation of Ours, We implore for you from Almighty God the abundance of divine graces, in pledge of which and as a token of Our Benevolence, We impart to you with a paternal spirit the apostolic benediction.

Dated Rome, at St. Peter's, January 6, 1962, feast of the Epiphany, the fourth year of Our pontificate.

JOHN XXIII

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\* Partial indulgence of 500 days for devoutly reciting the above prayer. Plenary Indulgence once a month under the usual conditions if said daily.

