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*The*  
**CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD**

*(Ad Catholici Sacerdotii)*

*Encyclical of*  
**HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI**

**With Excerpts on the Priesthood  
From Other Encyclicals**

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# The Catholic Priesthood

## (*Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*)

*The Encyclical issued by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, on December 20, 1935. Text of translation furnished by the News Service of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.*

BY the inscrutable design of Divine Providence We were raised to this summit of the Catholic priesthood. From that moment Our thoughts were turned to all the innumerable children whom God entrusted to Us. Yet, in a special way, We have felt an affectionate and earnest solicitude towards those who have the commission to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world," for those who have been signalled out and adorned by the priestly character. In a still more special way Our thoughts have turned towards those dearly beloved young students who are being educated in the shadow of the sanctuary and are preparing themselves for this most noble charge, the priesthood.

Even in the first months of Our Pontificate, before We had addressed Our solemn word to the whole Catholic world, We hastened to lay stress upon the principles and ideals which ought to guide and inspire the education of future priests. This We did by Our Apostolic Letter *Officiorum omnium* written on the first of August, 1922, to Our beloved son, the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities. And whenever Our pastoral watchfulness prompts Us to consider more in particular the good estate and the needs of the Church, Our attention is directed always, and before all things else, to priests and clergy.

### SPECIAL INTEREST

Nor is there lacking witness to this Our special interest in the priesthood. For We have erected many new seminaries; and others We have, at great expense, provided with new and befitting buildings, or endowed more liberally with revenues or staff, that they may the more worthily attain their high aim.

Upon the occasion of Our Sacerdotal Jubilee, We allowed

that event, so blessed in its memories, to be celebrated with some solemnity, and We even encouraged with fatherly gratification the marks of filial affection which came to Us from every part of the globe. Our reason was that We regarded this celebration not so much as a homage to Our Person, as a dutiful tribute of honor to the dignity of the priestly character.

Similarly, We decreed a reform of studies in ecclesiastical faculties, by the Apostolic Constitution *Deus scientiarum Dominus*, of the twenty-fourth of May, 1931. Our special purpose in this decree was to make even broader and higher the culture and learning of priests.

This matter, indeed, is of so great and universal importance that We think fitting to devote to it a special Encyclical; since it is Our desire that the faithful, who already possess the priceless gift of Faith, may appreciate the sublimity of the Catholic Priesthood and its providential mission in the world; that those, too, who do not yet possess the Faith, but with uprightness and sincerity are in search of Truth, may share this appreciation with the faithful; above all, that those who are themselves called may have still deeper understanding and esteem of their vocation. This subject is particularly opportune at the present moment, for it is the end of the year which has seen extended, beyond the Eternal City to the whole Catholic world, the Jubilee of the Redemption. This Extraordinary Jubilee, at Lourdes, came, like a sunset, to a splendid close. There, under the mantle of the Immaculate, for a fervent and uninterrupted Eucharistic Triduum, gathered together Catholic clergy of every tongue and rite. Our beloved and venerated priests, never more energetic in well-doing than during this special Holy Year, are the ministers of the Redemption of which this year was the Jubilee. Moreover, this year, as We said in the Apostolic Constitution *Quod nuper*, commemorated, likewise, the nineteenth centenary of the institution of the priesthood.

#### APOSTLES OF EDUCATION

Our previous Encyclicals were directed to throwing the light of Catholic doctrine upon the gravest of the problems peculiar to modern life. Our present Encyclical finds a natural place among these others, opportunely supplementing

them. The priest is, indeed, both by vocation and divine commission, the chief apostle and tireless furtherer of the Christian education of youth; in the name of God, the priest blesses Christian marriage, and defends its sanctity and indissolubility against the attacks and evasions suggested by cupidity and sensuality; the priest contributes most effectively to the solution, or at least the mitigation, of social conflicts, since he preaches Christian brotherhood, declares to all their mutual obligations of justice and charity, brings peace to hearts embittered by moral and economic hardship, and alike to rich and poor points out the only true riches to which all men both can and should aspire. Finally, the priest is the most valorous leader in that crusade of expiation and penance to which We have invited all men of good will. For there is need of reparation for the blasphemies, wickedness and crimes which dishonor humanity today, an age perhaps unparalleled in its need for the mercy and pardon of God. The enemies of the Church themselves well know the vital importance of the priesthood; for against the priesthood in particular, as We have already had to lament in the case of Our dear Mexico, they direct the point of their attacks. It is the priesthood they desire to be rid of; that they may clear the way for that destruction of the Church, which has been so often attempted yet never achieved.

## I

The human race has always felt the need of a priesthood: of men, that is, who have the official charge to be mediators between God and humanity, men who should consecrate themselves entirely to this mediation, as to the very purpose of their lives, men set aside to offer to God public prayers and sacrifices in the name of human society. For human society as such is bound to offer to God public and social worship. It is bound to acknowledge in Him its Supreme Lord and first beginning, and to strive toward Him as to its last end, to give Him thanks and offer Him propitiation. In fact, priests are to be found among all peoples whose customs are known, except those compelled by violence to act against the most sacred laws of human nature. They may, indeed, be in the service of false divinities; but wherever religion is professed, wherever altars are built,

there also is a priesthood surrounded by particular marks of honor and veneration.

Yet in the splendor of Divine Revelation the priest is seen invested with a dignity far greater still. This dignity was foreshadowed of old by the venerable and mysterious figure of Melchisedech, Priest and King, whom St. Paul recalls as prefiguring the Person and Priesthood of Christ Our Lord Himself.

#### ST. PAUL'S DEFINITION

The priest, according to the magnificent definition given by St. Paul is indeed a man *Ex hominibus assumptus*, "taken from amongst men," yet *pro hominibus constituitur in his quæ sunt ad Deum*, "ordained for men in the things that appertain to God": his office is not for human things, and things that pass away, however lofty and valuable these may seem; but for things divine and enduring. These eternal things may, perhaps, through ignorance, be scorned and contemned, or even attacked with diabolical fury and malice, as sad experience has often proved, and proves even today; but they always continue to hold the first place in the aspirations, individual and social, of humanity, because the human heart feels irresistibly it is made for God and is restless till it rests in Him.

The Old Law, inspired by God and promulgated by Moses, set up a priesthood, which was, in this manner, of divine institution; and determined for it every detail of its duty, residence and rite. It would seem that God, in His great care for them, wished to impress upon the still primitive mind of the Jewish people one great central idea. This idea throughout the history of the chosen people, was to shed its light over all events, laws, ranks and offices: the idea of sacrifice and priesthood. These were to become, through faith in the future Messiah, a source of hope, glory, power and spiritual liberation. The temple of Solomon, astonishing in richness and splendor, was still more wonderful in its rites and ordinances. Erected to the one true God as a tabernacle of the divine Majesty upon earth, it was also a sublime poem sung to that sacrifice and that priesthood, which, though type and symbol, was still so august, that the sacred figure of its High Priest moved the conqueror Alexander the Great, to bow in reverence; and God

Himself visited His wrath upon the impious king Balthasar because he made revel with the sacred vessels of the temple. Yet that ancient priesthood derived its greatest majesty and glory from being a foretype of the Christian priesthood; the priesthood of the New and eternal Covenant sealed with the Blood of the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

The Apostle of the Gentiles thus perfectly sums up what may be said of the greatness, the dignity and the duty of the Christian priesthood: *Sic nos existimet homo ut ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei*—"Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God." The priest is the minister of Christ, an instrument, that is to say, in the hands of the Divine Redeemer. He continues the work of the Redemption in all its world-embracing universality and divine efficacy, that work that wrought so marvellous a transformation in the world. Thus the priest, as is said with good reason, is indeed "another Christ"; for, in some way, he is himself a continuation of Christ. "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you," is spoken to the priest, and hence the priest, like Christ, continues to give "glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will."

#### TEACHINGS OF COUNCIL

For, in the first place, as the Council of Trent teaches, Jesus Christ at the Last Supper instituted the Sacrifice and the priesthood of the New Covenant: "our Lord and God, although once and for all, by means of His death on the altar of the cross, He was to offer Himself to God the Father, that thereon He might accomplish eternal Redemption; yet, because death was not to put an end to His priesthood, at the Last Supper, the same night in which He was betrayed, in order to leave to His beloved spouse the Church, a sacrifice which should be visible (as the nature of man requires), which should represent that bloody sacrifice, once and for all to be completed on the cross, which should perpetuate His memory to the end of time, and which should apply its saving power unto the remission of the sins we daily commit, showing Himself made a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, offered to God the Father, under the appearance of bread and wine, His Body and Blood, giving

them to the Apostles (whom He was then making priests of the New Covenant) to be consumed under the signs of these same things, and commanded the Apostles and their successors in the priesthood to offer them, by the words 'Do this in commemoration of Me.'"

And thenceforth, the Apostles, and their successors in the priesthood, began to lift to heaven that "clean oblation" foretold by Malachy, through which the name of God is great among the gentiles. And now, that same oblation in every part of the world and at every hour of the day and night, is offered and will continue to be offered without interruption till the end of time: a true sacrificial act, not merely symbolical, which has a real efficacy unto the reconciliation of sinners with the Divine Majesty.

"Appeased by this oblation, the Lord grants grace and the gift of repentance, and forgives iniquities and sins, however great." The reason of this is given by the same Council in these words: "For there is one and the same Victim, there is present the same Christ who once offered Himself upon the Cross, who now offers Himself by the ministry of priests, only the manner of the offering being different."

#### POWER OF THE PRIEST

And thus the ineffable greatness of the human priest stands forth in all its splendor; for he has power over the very Body of Jesus Christ, and makes It present upon our altars. In the name of Christ Himself he offers It a victim infinitely pleasing to the Divine Majesty. "Wondrous things are these," justly exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "so wonderful, they surpass wonder."

Besides this power over the real Body of Christ, the priest has received other powers, august and sublime, over His Mystical Body. There is no need, My Venerable Brethren, to enlarge upon the beautiful doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, a doctrine so dear to St. Paul; this beautiful doctrine that shows us the Person of the Word-made-Flesh in union with all His brethren. For from Him to them comes a supernatural influence, so that they, with Him as Head, form a single Body of which they are the members. Now a priest is the appointed "dispenser of the mysteries of God," for the benefit of the members of the Mystical Body of Christ; since he is the ordinary minister



of nearly all the Sacraments,—those channels through which the grace of the Saviour flows for the good of humanity. The Christian, at almost every important stage of his mortal career, finds at his side the priest with power received from God, in the act of communicating or increasing that grace which is the supernatural life of his soul.

Scarcely is he born before the priest baptizing him, brings him by a new birth to a more noble and precious life, a supernatural life, and makes him a son of God and of the Church of Jesus Christ. To strengthen him to fight bravely in spiritual combats, a priest invested with special dignity makes him a soldier of Christ by holy chrism. Then, as soon as he is able to recognize and value the Bread of Angels, the priest gives It to him, the living and life-giving Food come down from Heaven. If he fall, the priest raises him up again in the name of God, and reconciles him to God with the Sacrament of Penance. Again, if he is called by God to found a family and to collaborate with Him in the transmission of human life throughout the world, thus increasing the number of the faithful on earth and, thereafter, the ranks of the elect in Heaven, the priest is there to bless his espousals and unblemished love; and when, finally, arrived at the portals of eternity, the Christian feels the need of strength and courage before presenting himself at the tribunal of the Divine Judge, the priest with the holy oils anoints the failing members of the sick or dying Christian, and reconsecrates and comforts him.

Thus the priest accompanies the Christian throughout the pilgrimage of this life to the gates of Heaven. He accompanies the body to its resting place in the grave with rites and prayers of immortal hope. And even beyond the threshold of eternity he follows the soul to aid it with Christian suffrages, if need there be of further purification and alleviation. Thus, from the cradle to the grave the priest is ever beside the faithful, a guide, a solace, a minister of salvation and dispenser of grace and blessing.

#### POWER TO REMIT SINS

But among all these powers of the priest over the Mystical Body of Christ for the benefit of the faithful, there is one of which the simple mention made above will not content Us. This is that power which, as St. John Chrysostom

says: "God gave neither to Angels nor Archangels"—the power to remit sins. "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain they are retained"; a tremendous power, so peculiar to God that even human pride could not make the mind conceive that it could be given to man. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And, when we see it exercised by a mere man there is reason to ask ourselves, not, indeed, with pharisaical scandal, but with reverent surprise at such a dignity: "Who is 'this that forgiveth sins also?'" But it is so: the God-Man who possessed the "power on earth to forgive sins" willed to hand it on to His priests; to relieve, in His divine generosity and mercy, the need of moral purification which is rooted in the human heart.

What a comfort to the guilty, when, stung with remorse and repenting of his sins, he hears the word of the priest who says to him in God's name: "I absolve thee from thy sins!" These words fall, it is true, from the lips of one who, in his turn, must needs beg the same absolution from another priest. This does not debase the merciful gift; but makes it, rather, appear greater; since beyond the weak creature is seen more clearly the hand of God through whose power is wrought this wonder. As an illustrious layman has written, treating with rare competence of spiritual things: ". . . when a priest, groaning in spirit at his own unworthiness and at the loftiness of his office, places his consecrated hands upon our heads; when, humiliated at finding himself the dispenser of the Blood of the Covenant; each time amazed as he pronounces the words that give life; when a sinner has absolved a sinner; we, who rise from our knees before him, feel we have done nothing debasing. . . . We have been at the feet of a man who represented Jesus Christ, . . . we have been there to receive the dignity of free men and of sons of God."

These august powers are conferred upon the priest in a special Sacrament designed to this end: they are not merely passing or temporary in the priest, but are stable and perpetual, united as they are with the indelible character imprinted on his soul whereby he becomes "a priest forever"; whereby he becomes like unto Him in whose eternal priesthood he has been made a sharer. Even the most lamentable downfall, which, through human frailty, is possible to a

priest, can never blot out from his soul the priestly character. But along with this character and these powers, the priest through the Sacrament of Orders receives new and special grace with special helps. Thereby, if only he will loyally further, by his free and personal coöperation, the divinely powerful action of the grace itself, he will be able worthily to fulfill all the duties, however arduous, of his lofty calling. He will not be overborne, but will be able to bear the tremendous responsibilities inherent to his priestly duty; responsibilities which have made fearful even the stoutest champions of the Christian priesthood, men like St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Great, St. Charles and many others.

### MINISTER OF CHRIST

The Catholic priest is minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God in another way, that is, by his words. The "ministry of the word" is a right which is inalienable; it is a duty which cannot be disallowed; for it is imposed by Jesus Christ Himself: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The Church of Christ, depository and infallible guardian of divine revelation, by means of her priests, pours out the treasures of heavenly truth; she preaches Him who is "the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world"; she sows with divine bounty that seed which is small and worthless to the profane eyes of the world, but which is like the mustard seed of the Gospel. For it has within itself power to strike strong deep roots in souls which are sincere and thirsting for the truth, and make them like sturdy trees able to withstand the wildest storms.

Amidst all the aberrations of human thought, infatuated by a false emancipation from every law and curb; and amidst the awful corruptions of human malice, the Church rises up like a bright lighthouse warning by the clearness of its beam every deviation to right or left from the way of truth, and pointing out to one and all the right course that they should follow. Woe if ever this beacon should be—We do not say extinguished, for that is impossible owing to the unfailing promises on which it is founded—but if it should be hindered

from shedding far and wide its beneficent light! We see already with Our own eyes whither the world has been brought by its arrogant rejection of divine revelation, and its pursuit of false philosophical and moral theories that bear the specious name of "science." That it has not fallen still lower down the slope of error and vice is due to the guidance of the light of Christian truth that always shines in the world. Now the Church exercises her "ministry of the word" through her priests of every grade of the Hierarchy, in which each has his wisely allotted place. These she sends everywhere as unwearied heralds of the good tidings which alone can save and advance true civilization and culture, or help them to rise again. The word of the priest enters the soul and brings light and power; the voice of the priest rises calmly above the storms of passion, fearlessly to proclaim the truth, and exhort to the good; that truth which elucidates and solves the gravest problems of human life; that good which no misfortune can take from us, which death but secures and renders immortal.

Consider the truths themselves which the priest if faithful to his ministry, must frequently inculcate. Ponder them one by one and dwell upon their inner power; for they make plain the influence of the priest, and how strong and beneficent it can be for the moral education, social concord and peaceful development of peoples. He brings home to young and old the fleeting nature of the present life; the perishableness of earthly goods; the value of spiritual goods and of the immortal soul; the severity of divine judgment; the spotless holiness of the divine gaze that reads the hearts of all; the justice of God, which "will render to every man according to his works." These and similar lessons the priest teaches; a teaching fitted indeed to moderate the feverish search for pleasure, and the uncontrolled greed for worldly goods, that debase so much of modern life, and spur on the different classes of society to fight one another like enemies, instead of helping one another like friends. In this clash of selfish interest, and unleashed hate, and dark plans of revenge, nothing could be better or more powerful to heal, than loudly to proclaim the "new commandment" of Christ. That commandment enjoins a love which extends to all, knows no barriers nor national boundaries, excludes no race, excepts not even its own enemies.

## POWER FOR GOOD

The experience of twenty centuries fully and gloriously reveals the power for good of the word of the priest. Being the faithful echo and reëcho of the "word of God," which "is living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword," it too reaches "unto the division of the soul and spirit"; it awakens heroism of every kind, in every class and place, and inspires the self-forgetting deeds of the most generous hearts. All the good that Christian civilization has brought into the world is due, at least radically, to the word and works of the Catholic priesthood. Such a past might, of itself, serve as sufficient guarantee for the future; but we have a still more secure guarantee, "a more firm prophetic word" in the infallible promises of Christ.

The work, too, of the Missions manifests most vividly the power of expansion given by divine grace to the Church. This work is advanced and carried on principally by priests. Pioneers of faith and love, at the cost of innumerable sacrifices, they extend and widen the Kingdom of God upon earth.

Finally, the priest, in another way, follows the example of Christ. Of Him it is written that He "passed the whole night in the prayer of God" and "ever lives to make intercession for us"; and like Him, the priest, is public and official intercessor of humanity before God; he has the duty and commission of offering to God in the name of the Church, over and above sacrifice strictly so-called, the "sacrifice of praise," in public and official prayer; for several times each day, with psalms, prayers and hymns taken in great part from the inspired books, he pays to God this dutiful tribute of adoration and thus performs his necessary office of interceding for humanity. And never did humanity, in its afflictions, stand more in need of intercession and of the divine help which it brings. Who can tell how many chastisements priestly prayer wards off from sinful mankind, how many blessings it brings down and secures?

## RECOURSE TO PRAYER

If Our Lord made such magnificent and solemn promises even to private prayers, how much more powerful must be that prayer which is said *ex officio* in the name of the Church, the beloved Spouse of the Saviour? The Christian,

though in prosperity so often forgetful of God, yet in the depth of his heart keeps his confidence in prayer, feels that prayer is all powerful, and as by a holy instinct, in every distress, in every peril whether private or public, has recourse with special trust to the prayer of the priest. To it the unfortunate of every sort look for comfort; to it they have recourse, seeking divine aid in all the vicissitudes of this exile here on earth. Truly does the "priest occupy a place midway between God and human nature: from Him bringing to us absolving beneficence, offering our prayers to Him and appeasing the wrathful Lord."

A last tribute to the priesthood is given by the enemies of the Church. For as We have said on a previous page, they show that they fully appreciate the dignity and importance of the Catholic priesthood, by directing against it their first and fiercest blows; since they know well how close is the tie that binds the Church to her priests. The most rabid enemies of the Catholic priesthood are today the very enemies of God; a homage indeed to the priesthood, showing it the more worthy of honor and veneration.

## II

Most sublime, then, Venerable Brethren, is the dignity of the priesthood. Even the falling away of the few unworthy in the priesthood, however deplorable and distressing it may be, cannot dim the splendor of so lofty a dignity. Much less can the unworthiness of a few cause the worth and merit of so many to be overlooked; and how many have been, and are, in the priesthood, preëminent in holiness, in learning, in works of zeal, nay, even in martyrdom.

Nor must it be forgotten that personal unworthiness does not hinder the efficacy of a priest's ministry. For the unworthiness of the minister does not make void the Sacraments he administers; since the Sacraments derive their efficacy from the Blood of Christ, independently of the sanctity of the instrument, or, as scholastic language expresses it, the Sacraments work their effect *ex opere operato*.

Nevertheless, it is quite true that so holy an office demands holiness in him who holds it. A priest should have a loftiness of spirit, a purity of heart and a sanctity of life befitting the solemnity and holiness of the office he holds. For this, as We have said, makes the priest a mediator be-

tween God and man; a mediator in the place, and by the command, of Him who is "the one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ." The priest must, therefore, approach as close as possible to the perfection of Him whose vicar he is, and render himself ever more and more pleasing to God, by the sanctity of his life and of his deeds; because more than the scent of incense, or the beauty of churches and altars, God loves and accepts holiness. "They who are the intermediaries between God and His people," says St. Thomas, "must bear a good conscience before God, and a good name among men." On the contrary, whosoever handles and administers holy things, while blameworthy in his life, profanes them and is guilty of sacrilege: "They who are not holy ought not to handle holy things."

#### DIGNITY OF PRIESTHOOD

For this reason even in the Old Testament God commanded His priests and levites: "Let them therefore be holy because I am also holy: the Lord who sanctify them." In his canticle for the dedication of the temple, Solomon the Wise made this same request to the Lord in favor of the sons of Aaron: "Let Thy priests be clothed with justice: and let Thy saints rejoice." So, Venerable Brethren, may we not ask with St. Robert Bellarmine: "If so great uprightness, holiness and lively devotion was required of priests who offered sheep and oxen, and praised God for temporal blessings; what, I ask, is required of those priests who sacrifice the Divine Lamb and give thanks for eternal blessings?" "A great dignity," exclaims St. Laurence Justinian, "but great too is the responsibility; placed high in the eyes of men they must also be lifted up to the peak of virtue before the eye of Him who seeth all; otherwise their elevation will be not to their merit but to their damnation."

And surely every reason We have urged in showing the dignity of the Catholic priesthood does but reinforce its obligation of singular holiness; for as the Angelic Doctor teaches: "To fulfill the duties of Holy Orders, common goodness does not suffice; but excelling goodness is required; that they who receive Orders and are thereby higher in rank than the people, may also be higher in holiness." The Eucharistic Sacrifice in which the Immaculate Victim who

taketh away the sins of the world is immolated, requires in a special way that the priest, by a holy and spotless life, should make himself as far as he can, less unworthy of God, to whom he daily offers that adorable Victim, the very Word of God incarnate for love of us. *Agnoscite quod agitis, imitamini quod tractatis*, "realize what you are doing, and imitate what you handle," says the Church through the Bishop to the deacons as they are about to be consecrated priests. The priest is also the almoner of God's graces of which the Sacraments are the channels; how grave a reproach would it be, for one who dispenses these most precious graces, were he himself without them, or were he even to esteem them lightly and guard them with little care.

Moreover, the priest must teach the truths of faith; but the truths of religion are never so worthily and effectively taught as when taught by virtue; because, in the common saying: "Deeds speak louder than words." The priest must preach the law of the Gospel; but for that preaching to be effective, the most obvious and, by the Grace of God, the most persuasive argument, is to see the actual practice of the law in him who preaches it. St. Gregory the Great gives the reason: "The voice which penetrates the hearts of the hearers, is the voice commended by the speaker's own life; because what his word enjoins, his example helps to bring about." This exactly is what Holy Scripture says of our Divine Saviour: He "began to do and to teach." And the crowds hailed Him, not so much because "never did man speak like this man," but rather because "He hath done all things well." On the other hand, they who "say and do not," practising not what they preach, become like the Scribes and Pharisees. And Our Lord's rebuke to the other hand, they who "say and do not," practising not what they preach, the word of God, was yet administered publicly, in the presence of the listening crowd: "The Scribes and Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you observe and do: but according to their works do ye not." A preacher who does not try to ratify by his life's example the truth he preaches, only pulls down with one hand what he builds up with the other. On the contrary, God greatly blesses the labor of those heralds of the Gospel who attend first to their own holiness; they see their apostolate flourishing and



fruitful, and in the day of the harvest, "coming they shall come with joyfulness carrying in their sheaves."

#### SALVATION ENDANGERED

It would be a grave error fraught with many dangers should the priest, carried away by false zeal, neglect his own sanctification, and become over immersed in the external works, however holy, of the priestly ministry. Thereby, he would run a double risk. In the first place he endangers his own eternal salvation, as the great Apostle of the Gentiles feared for himself: "But I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway." In the second place he might lose, if not divine grace, certainly that unction of the Holy Spirit which gives such a marvellous force and efficacy to the external apostolate.

Now to all Christians in general it has been said: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect"; how much more then should the priest consider these words of the Divine Master as spoken to himself, called as he is by a special vocation to follow Christ more closely. Hence the Church publicly urges on all her clerics this most grave duty, placing it in the code of her laws: "Clerics must lead a life, both interior and exterior, more holy than the laity, and be an example to them by excelling in virtue and good works." And since the priest is an ambassador for Christ, he should so live as to be able with truth to make his own the words of the Apostle: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ"; he ought to live as another Christ who by the splendor of His virtue enlightened and still enlightens the world.

It is plain, then, that all Christian virtues should flourish in the soul of the priest. Yet there are some virtues which in a very particular manner attach themselves to the priest as most befitting and necessary to him. Of these the first is piety, or godliness, according to the exhortation of the Apostle to his beloved Timothy: *Exerce . . . teipsum ad pietatem*, "exercise thyself unto godliness." Indeed the priest's relations with God are so intimate, so delicate and so frequent, that clearly they should ever be graced by the sweet odor of piety; if "godliness is profitable to all things," it is especially profitable to a right exercise of the priestly

charge. Without piety the holiest practices, the most solemn rites of the sacred ministry, will be performed mechanically and out of habit; they will be devoid of spirit, unction and life. But remark, Venerable Brethren, the piety of which We speak is not that shallow and superficial piety which attracts but does not nourish, is busy but does not sanctify. We mean that solid piety which is not dependent upon changing mood or feeling. It is based upon principles of sound doctrine; it is ruled by staunch convictions; and so it resists the assaults and the illusions of temptation. This piety should primarily be directed towards God our Father in Heaven; yet it should be extended also to the Mother of God. The priest even more than the faithful should have devotion to Our Lady, for the relation of the priest to Christ is more deeply and truly like that which Mary bears to her Divine Son.

It is impossible to treat of the piety of a Catholic priest without being drawn on to speak, too, of another most precious treasure of the Catholic priesthood, that is, of chastity; for from piety springs the meaning and the beauty of chastity. Clerics of the Latin Church in higher Orders are bound by a grave obligation of chastity; so grave is the obligation in them of its perfect and total observance that a transgression involves the added guilt of sacrilege.

#### CELIBACY REVERED

Though this law does not bind, in all its amplitude, clerics of the Oriental Churches, yet among them also, ecclesiastical celibacy is revered; indeed in some cases, especially in the higher Orders of the Hierarchy, it is a necessary and obligatory requisite.

A certain connection between this virtue and the sacerdotal ministry can be seen even by the light of reason alone: since "God is a Spirit," it is only fitting that he who dedicates and consecrates himself to God's service should in some way "divest himself of the body." The ancient Romans perceived this fitness; one of their laws which ran *Ad divos adeunto caste*, "approach the gods chastely," is quoted by one of their greatest orators with the following comment: "The law orders us to present ourselves to the gods in chastity—of spirit, that is, in which are all things. Nor does this exclude chastity of the body, which is to be

understood, since the spirit is so far superior to the body; for it should be remembered that bodily chastity cannot be preserved, unless spiritual chastity be maintained." In the Old Law, Moses in the name of God commanded Aaron and his sons to remain within the Tabernacle, and so to keep continent, during the seven days in which they were exercising their sacred functions.

But the Christian priesthood, being much superior to that of the Old Law, demanded a still greater purity. The law of ecclesiastical celibacy, whose first written traces presuppose a still earlier unwritten practice, dates back to a canon of the Council of Elvira, at the beginning of the fourth century, when persecution still raged. This law only makes obligatory what might in any case almost be termed a moral exigency that springs from the Gospel and the Apostolic preaching. For the Divine Master showed such high esteem for chastity, and exalted it as something beyond the common power; He Himself was the Son of a Virgin Mother, *Florem Matris Virginis*, and was brought up in the virgin family of Joseph and Mary; He showed special love for pure souls such as the two Johns—the Baptist and the Evangelist. The great Apostle Paul, faithful interpreter of the New Law and of the mind of Christ, preached the inestimable value of virginity, in view of a more fervent service of God, and gave the reason when he said: "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God." All this had almost inevitable consequences: the priests of the New Law felt the heavenly attraction of this chosen virtue; they sought to be of the number of those "to whom it is given to take this word," and they spontaneously bound themselves to its observance. Soon it came about that the practice, in the Latin Church, received the sanction of ecclesiastical law. The Second Council of Carthage at the end of the fourth century declared: "What the Apostles taught, and the early Church preserved, let us too, observe."

#### HARMONY BETWEEN CHURCHES

In the Oriental Church, too, most illustrious Fathers bear witness to the excellence of Catholic celibacy. In this matter as in others there was harmony between the Latin and Oriental Churches where accurate discipline flourished.

St. Epiphanius at the end of the fourth century tells us that celibacy applied even to the subdiaconate: "The Church does not on any account admit a man living in the wedded state and having children, even though he have only one wife, to the orders of deacon, priest, bishop or subdeacon; but only him whose wife be dead or who should abstain from the use of marriage; this is done in those places especially where the ecclesiastical canons are accurately followed." The Deacon of Edessa and Doctor of the Universal Church, well called the Harp of the Holy Spirit, St. Ephraem, the Syrian, is particularly eloquent on this matter. In one of his poems, addressed to his friend, the Bishop Abraham, he says: "Thou art true to thy name, Abraham, for thou also art the father of many: but because thou hast no wife as Abraham had Sara, behold thy flock is thy spouse. Bring up its children in thy truth; may they become to thee children of the spirit and sons of the promise that makes them heirs to Eden. O sweet fruit of chastity, in which the priesthood finds its delights . . . the horn of plenty flowed over and anointed thee, a hand rested on thee and chose thee out, the Church desired thee and held thee dear." And in another place: "It is not enough for the priest and the name of the priesthood, it is not enough, I say, for him who offers up the living body, to cleanse his soul and tongue and hand and make spotless his whole body; but he must at all times be absolutely and preëminently pure, because he is established as a mediator between God and the human race. May He be praised who made His servants clean!" St. John Chrysostom affirms: "The priest must be so pure that, if he were to be lifted up and placed in the heavens themselves, he might take a place in the midst of the Angels."

In short the very height, or, to use St. Epiphanius' phrase, "the incredible honor and dignity" of the Christian priesthood, which We have briefly described, shows how becoming is clerical celibacy and the law which enjoins it. Priests have a duty which, in a certain way, is higher than that of the most pure spirits "who stand before the Lord." Is it not right, then, that he live an all but angelic life? A priest is one who should be totally dedicated to the things of the Lord. Is it not right, then, that he be entirely detached from the things of the world, and have his conversation in Heaven? A priest's charge is to be solicitous for the

eternal salvation of souls, continuing in their regard the work of the Redeemer. Is it not, then, fitting that he keep himself free from the cares of a family, which would absorb a great part of his energies?

And truly an ordination ceremony, frequent though it be in the Catholic Church, never fails to touch the hearts of those present: how admirable a sight, these young ordinands, who before receiving the subdiaconate, before, that is, consecrating themselves utterly to the service and the worship of God, freely renounce the joys and the pleasures which might rightfully be theirs in another walk of life. We say "freely," for though, after ordination, they are no longer free to contract earthly marriage, nevertheless they advance to ordination itself unconstrained by any law or person, and of their own spontaneous choice!

Notwithstanding all this, We do not wish that what We said in commendation of clerical celibacy should be interpreted as though it were Our mind in any way to blame, or, as it were, disapprove the different discipline legitimately prevailing in the Oriental Church. What We have said has been meant solely to exalt in the Lord something We consider one of the purest glories of the Catholic priesthood; something which seems to Us to correspond better to the desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to His purposes in regard to priestly souls.

Not less than by his chastity, the Catholic priest ought to be distinguished by his detachment. Surrounded by the corruptions of a world in which everything can be bought and sold, he must pass through them utterly free of selfishness. He must holily spurn all vile greed of earthly gains, since he is in search of souls, not of money, of the glory of God, not his own. He is no mercenary working for a temporal recompense, nor yet an employee who, whilst attending conscientiously to duties of his office, at the same time is looking to his career and personal promotion; he is the "good soldier of Christ" who "entangleth not himself with secular business: that he may please Him to whom he hath engaged himself."

The minister of God is a father of souls; and he knows that his toils and his cares cannot adequately be repaid with wealth and honors of earth. He is not indeed forbidden to receive fitting sustenance, according to the teaching of the

Apostle: "They that serve the altar may partake with the altar . . . so also the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." But once "called to the inheritance of the Lord," as his very title "cleric" declares, a priest must expect no other recompense than that promised by Christ to His Apostles: "Your reward is very great in Heaven." Woe to the priest who, forgetful of these divine promises should become "greedy of filthy lucre." Woe if he join the herd of the worldly over whom the Church like the Apostle grieves: "All seek the things that are their own: not the things that are Jesus Christ's." Such a priest, besides failing in his vocation, would earn the contempt even of his own people. They would perceive in him the deplorable contradiction between his conduct and the doctrine so clearly expounded by Christ, which the priest is bound to teach: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in Heaven." Judas, an Apostle of Christ, "one of the twelve," as the Evangelists sadly observe, was led down to the abyss of iniquity precisely through the spirit of greed for earthly things. Remembering him, it is easy to grasp how this same spirit could have brought such harm upon the Church throughout the centuries: greed, called by the Holy Spirit the "root of all evil," can incite to any crime; and a priest who is poisoned by this vice, even though he stop short of crime, will nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, make common cause with the enemies of God and of the Church, and coöperate in their evil designs.

On the other hand, by sincere disinterestedness the priest can hope to win the hearts of all. For detachment from earthly goods, if inspired by lively faith, is always accompanied by tender compassion towards the unfortunate of every kind. Thus the priest becomes a veritable father of the poor. Mindful of the touching words of his Saviour, "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me," he sees in them, and, with particular affection, venerates and loves Jesus Christ Himself.

Thus the Catholic priest is freed from the bonds of a family and of self-interest,—the two chief bonds which could bind him too closely to earth. Thus freed, his heart will more readily take flame from that heavenly fire that burns

in the Heart of Jesus; that fire that seeks only to inflame apostolic hearts and through them "cast fire on all the earth." This is the fire of zeal. Like the zeal of Jesus described in Holy Scripture, the zeal of the priest for the glory of God and the salvation of souls ought to consume him. It should make him forget himself and all earthly things. It should powerfully urge him to dedicate himself utterly to his sublime work, and to search out means ever more effective for an apostolate ever wider and ever better.

The Good Shepherd said: "And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring;" and again, "See the countries for they are white already to the harvest." How can a priest meditate upon these words and not feel his heart enkindled with yearning to lead souls to the Heart of the Good Shepherd? How can he fail to offer himself to the Lord of the harvest for unremitting toil? Our Lord saw the multitudes "lying like sheep that have no shepherd." Such multitudes are to be seen today not only in the far distant lands of the Missions, but also, alas! in countries which have been Christian for centuries. How can a priest see such multitudes and not feel deeply within himself an echo of that divine pity which so often moved the Heart of the Son of God?—a priest, we say, who is conscious of possessing the words of life and of having in his hands the God-given means of regeneration and salvation?

But thanks be to God, it is just this flame of apostolic zeal which is one of the brightest jewels in the crown of the Catholic priesthood. Our heart fills with fatherly consolation at the sight of Our Brothers and Our beloved Sons, Bishops and Priests, who like chosen troops ever prompt to the call of their chief hasten to all outposts of this vast field. There they engage in the peaceful but bitter warfare of truth against error, of light against darkness, of the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of Satan.

But, by its very nature as an active and courageous company, the Catholic priesthood must have the spirit of discipline, or, to use a more deeply Christian word, obedience. It is obedience which binds together all ranks into the harmony of the Church's Hierarchy.

The Bishop, in his admonition to the ordinands, says: "With a certain wonderful variety Holy Church is clothed, made comely and is ruled; since in her some are consecrated

Pontiffs, and others priests of lesser degree, and from many members of differing dignity there is formed one Body of Christ." This obedience priests promised to the Bishop after Ordination, the holy oil still fresh on their hands. On the day of his consecration the Bishop, in his turn, swore obedience to the supreme visible Head of the Church, the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Let then obedience bind ever closer together these various members of the Hierarchy, one with another, and all with the Head; and thus make the Church Militant a foe truly terrible to the enemies of God, *ut castrorum aciem ordinatam*, "as an army set in array." Let obedience temper excessive zeal on the one hand, and put the spur to weakness and slackness on the other. Let it assign to each his place and station. These each should accept without resistance; for otherwise the magnificent work of the Church in the world would be sadly hindered. Let each one see in the arrangement of his hierarchical Superiors the arrangements of the only true Head, whom all obey: Jesus Christ, Our Lord, who became for us "obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."

The divine High Priest wished us to have abundant witness to His own most perfect obedience to the Eternal Father; for this reason both the Prophecies and the Gospels often testify to the entire submission of the Son of God to the will of the Father. "When He cometh into the world He saith; sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not: but a body Thou has fitted to Me. . . . Then said I: Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will, O God. . . ." "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." On His very cross He consecrated obedience. He did not wish to commit His soul into the hands of His Father before having declared that all was fulfilled in Him that the Sacred Scriptures had foretold; He had accomplished the entire charge entrusted to Him by the Father, even to the last deeply mysterious "I thirst," which He pronounced "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." By these words He wished to show that zeal even the most ardent ought always to be completely subjected to the will of the Father; that our zeal should always be controlled by obedience to those who for us, have the place of the Father, and convey to us His will, in other words our lawful Superiors in the Hierarchy.



## LEARNING

But the portrait of the Catholic priest which We intend to exhibit to the world would be unfinished were We to omit another most important feature,—learning. This the Church requires of him; for the Catholic priest is set up as a “Master in Israel”; he has received from Jesus Christ the office and commission of teaching truth: “Teach . . . all nations.” He must teach the truth that heals and saves; and because of this teaching, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, he has a duty towards “the learned and the unlearned.” But how can he teach unless he himself possess knowledge? “The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth,” said the Holy Spirit in the Prophecy of Malachy. Who could ever utter a word in praise of sacerdotal learning more weighty than that which divine Wisdom itself once spoke by the mouth of Osee: “Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee that thou shalt not do the office of priesthood to Me.” The priest should have full grasp of the Catholic teaching on faith and morals; he should know how to present it to others; and he should be able to give the reasons for the dogmas, laws and observances of the Church of which he is minister. Profane sciences have indeed made much progress; but in religious questions there is much ignorance still darkening the mind of our contemporaries. This ignorance the priest must dispel. Never was more pointed than today the warning of Tertullian, *Hoc unum gestit interdum (veritas), ne ignorata damnetur*,” “This alone truth sometimes craves, that it be not condemned unheard.” It is the priest’s task to clear away from men’s minds the mass of prejudices and misunderstandings which hostile adversaries have piled up; the modern mind is eager for the truth, and the priest should be able to point it out with serene frankness; there are souls still hesitating, distressed by doubts, and the priest should inspire courage and trust, and guide them with calm security to the safe port of faith, faith accepted by both head and heart; error makes its onslaughts, arrogant and persistent, and the priest should know how to meet them with a defense vigorous and active, yet solid and unruffled.

## CONTINUED STUDIES

Therefore, Venerable Brethren, it is necessary that the priest, even among the absorbing tasks of his charge, and ever with a view to it, should continue his theological studies with unremitting zeal. The knowledge acquired at the seminary is indeed a sufficient foundation with which to begin; but it must be grasped more thoroughly, and perfected by an ever-increasing knowledge and understanding of the sacred sciences. Herein is the source of effective preaching and of influence over the souls of others. Yet even more is required. The dignity of the office he holds, and the maintenance of a becoming respect and esteem among the people, which helps so much in his pastoral work, demand more than purely ecclesiastical learning. The priest must be graced by no less knowledge and culture than is usual among well-bred and well-educated people of his day. This is to say that he must be healthily modern, as is the Church, which is at home in all times and all places, and adapts itself to all; which blesses and furthers all healthy initiative and has no fear of the progress, even the most daring progress, of science, if only it be true science.

Indeed, in all ages the Catholic clergy has distinguished itself in every field of human knowledge; in fact, in certain centuries it so took the lead in the field of learning that the word "cleric" became synonymous with "learned." The Church preserved and saved the treasures of ancient culture, which without her and her monasteries would have been almost entirely lost; and her most illustrious Doctors show that all human knowledge can help to throw light upon and to defend the Catholic faith. An illustrious example of this We Ourselves have recently called to the world's attention. For We crowned with the halo of sanctity and the glorious title of Doctor of the Church that great teacher of the incomparable Aquinas: Albert of Cologne, whom his contemporaries had already honored with the titles of Great and of Universal Doctor.

Today it could hardly be hoped that the clergy could hold a similar primacy in every branch of knowledge; the range of human science has become so vast that no man can comprehend it all, much less become distinguished in each of its numberless branches. Nevertheless wise encourage-

ment and help should be given to those members of the clergy, who, by taste and special gifts, feel a call to devote themselves to study and research, in this or that branch of science, in this or that art; they do not thereby deny their clerical profession; for all this, undertaken within just limits and under the guidance of the Church, redounds to the good estate of the Church and to the glory of her divine Head, Jesus Christ. And among the rest of the clergy, none should remain content with a standard of learning and culture which sufficed, perhaps, in other times; they must try to attain—or, rather, they must actually attain—a higher standard of general education and of learning. It must be broader and more complete; and it must correspond to the generally higher level and wider scope of modern education as compared with the past.

Sometimes, it is true, and even in modern times, Our Lord makes the world, as it were, His plaything; for He has been pleased to elect to the priestly state men almost devoid of that learning of which We have been speaking; and through them He has worked wonders. But He did this that all might learn, if there be a choice, to prize holiness more than learning; not to place more trust in human than in divine means. He did this because the world has need, from time to time, to hear repeated that wholesome, practical lesson: "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen to confound the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in His sight."

In the natural order, divine miracles suspend for a moment the effect of physical laws, but do not revoke them. So, too, the case of these Saints, real living miracles in whom high sanctity made up for all the rest, does not make the lesson We have been teaching any the less true or any the less necessary.

#### VIRTUE, LEARNING REQUIRED

It is clear, then, that virtue and learning are required, that there is need of example and of edification, need for the priest to spread on all sides, and to all who draw near him "the good odor of Christ." This need is today more keenly felt, and has become more evident and urgent. This is because of Catholic Action, that movement so consoling, which has within it the power to spur on to the very highest

ideals of perfection. Through Catholic Action the relations of the laity with priests are becoming more frequent and more intimate. And in this collaboration, the laity quite naturally look upon the priest not merely as a guide, but as a model also of Christian life and of apostolic virtue.

### III

The state of the priesthood is thus most sublime, and the gifts it calls for very lofty. Hence, Venerable Brethren, the inescapable necessity of giving candidates for the sanctuary a training correspondingly superior.

Conscious of this necessity, the Church down the ages has shown for nothing a more tender solicitude and motherly care than for the training of her priests. She is not unaware that, as the religious and moral conditions of peoples depend in great measure upon their priests, so too, the future of the priest depends on the training he has received. The words of the Holy Spirit apply no less truly to him than to others: "A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Hence, the Church, moved by the Holy Spirit, has willed that everywhere seminaries should be erected, where candidates for the priesthood may be trained and educated with singular care.

The seminary is and should be the apple of your eye, Venerable Brethren, who share with Us the heavy weight of the government of the Church; it is, and should be, the chief object of your solicitude. Careful above all should be the choice of superiors and professors; and, in a most special manner, of the spiritual father, who has so delicate and so important a part in the nurture of the priestly spirit. Give the best of your clergy to your seminaries; do not fear to take them from other positions. These positions may seem of greater moment, but in reality their importance is not to be compared with that of the seminaries, which is capital and indispensable. Seek also from elsewhere, wherever you can find them, men really fitted for this noble task. Let them be such as teach priestly virtues, rather by example than by words, men who are capable of imparting, together with learning, a solid, manly and apostolic spirit. Make piety, purity, discipline and study flourish in the seminary. With prudent foresight, arm and fortify the immature minds

of students both against the temptations of the present, and against the far more serious perils of the future. For they will be exposed to all the temptations of the world, in the midst of which they must live, "that they save all."

### SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY

Now it is of great importance, as We have said, that priests should have a learning adequate to the requirements of the age. For the attainment of this, in addition to a solid classical education, there is required both instruction and training in scholastic philosophy "according to the method, and the mind and the principles of St. Thomas Aquinas"—*ad Angelici Doctoris rationem, doctrinam et principia*. This Our Illustrious Predecessor, Leo XIII, has called the *philosophia perennis*. It is essential to the future priest. It will help him to a thorough understanding of dogma. It will effectively forearm him against modern errors of whatever sort. It will sharpen his mind to distinguish truth from falsehood. It will form him to habits of intellectual clearness, so necessary in any studies or problems of the future. It will give him a great superiority over others, whose mere erudition, perhaps, is wider but who lack philosophical training.

There are some regions, where the dioceses are small, or students unhappily few, or where there is a shortage of means and suitable men. Hence it is impossible for every diocese to have its own seminary, equipped according to all the regulations of Canon Law and other prescriptions of the Church. Where this happens, it is most proper that the Bishops of the district should help one another in brotherly charity, should concentrate and unite their forces in a common seminary, fully worthy of its high purpose. The great advantages of such concentration amply repay the sacrifices entailed in obtaining it. It is indeed a sacrifice, grievous to the fatherly heart of a Bishop, to see his clerics, even for a time, taken away from their shepherd, who wishes himself to give his future co-workers his own apostolic spirit; and to see them taken away from the diocese which is to be the field of their ministry. But these sacrifices will all be repaid with interest when these clerics return as priests. They will be better formed, and more richly endowed with spiritual wealth, which they will spend with greater gener-

osity and with greater profit to their diocese. Therefore, We have never let pass an opportunity to favor, and encourage and foster such efforts. Often, in fact, We have suggested and recommended them. On Our part, also, wherever We thought it necessary, We have Ourselves, as is well known, erected or improved or enlarged several such regional seminaries, not without heavy expense and trouble; and We will continue in the future, by the help of God, to apply Ourselves with all zeal to this work; for We hold it to be most conducive to the good of the Church.

This achievement in the erection and management of Seminaries for the education of future priests deserves all praise. But it would be of little avail, were there any lack of care in the selecting and approving of candidates. In this selection and approval, all who are in charge of the clergy should have some part: superiors, spiritual directors and confessors, each in the manner and within the limits proper to his office. They must indeed foster and strengthen vocations with sedulous care; but with no less zeal they must discourage unsuitable candidates, and in good time send them away from a path not meant for them. Such are all youths who show a lack of necessary fitness, and who are, therefore, unlikely to persevere in the priestly ministry both worthily and becomingly. In these matters hesitation and delay is a serious mistake and may do serious harm. It is far better to dismiss an unfit student in the early stages; but if, for any reason, such dismissal has been delayed, the mistake should be corrected as soon as it is known. There should be no human consideration or false mercy. Such false mercy would be a real cruelty, not only towards the Church, to whom would be given an unfitted or unworthy minister, but also towards the youth himself; for, thus embarked upon a false course, he would find himself exposed to the risk of becoming a stumbling block to himself and to others with peril of eternal ruin.

#### TRUE PRIESTLY VOCATION

The Head of the Seminary lovingly follows the youths entrusted to his care and studies the inclinations of each. His watchful and experienced eye will perceive, without difficulty, whether one or other have, or have not, a true

priestly vocation. This, as you well know, Venerable Brethren, is not established so much by some inner feeling or devout attraction, which may sometimes be absent or hardly perceptible; but rather by a right intention in the aspirant, together with a combination of physical, intellectual and moral qualities which make him fitted for such a state of life. He must look to the priesthood solely from the noble motive of consecrating himself to the service of God and the salvation of souls; he must likewise have, or at least strive earnestly to acquire, solid piety, perfect purity of life and sufficient knowledge such as We have explained on a previous page. Thus he shows that he is called by God to the priestly state. Whoever, on the other hand, urged on, perhaps, by ill-advised parents, looks to this state as a means to temporal and earthly gains which he imagines and desires in the priesthood, as happened more often in the past; whoever is intractable, unruly or undisciplined, has small taste for piety, is not industrious, and shows little zeal for souls; whoever has a special tendency to sensuality, and after long trial has not proved he can conquer it; whoever has no aptitude for study and who will be unable to follow the prescribed courses with due satisfaction; all such cases show that they are not intended for the priesthood. By letting them go on almost to the threshold of the sanctuary, superiors only make it ever more difficult for them to draw back; and, perhaps, even cause them to accept ordination through human respect, without vocation and without the priestly spirit.

Let Superiors of seminaries, together with the spiritual directors and confessors, reflect how weighty a responsibility they assume before God, before the Church, and before the youths themselves, if they do not take all means at their disposal to avoid a false step. We declare too, that confessors and spiritual directors could also be responsible for such a grave error; not indeed because they can take any outward action, since that is severely forbidden them by their most delicate office itself, and often also by the inviolable sacramental seal; but because they can have a great influence on the souls of the individual students, and with paternal firmness they should guide each according to his spiritual needs. Should the superiors, for whatever reason, not take steps or show themselves weak, then especially should confessors

and spiritual directors admonish the unsuited and unworthy, without any regard to human consideration, of their obligation to retire while yet there is time; in this they should keep to the most secure opinion, which in this case is the one most in favor of the penitent, for it saves him from a step which could be for him eternally fatal. If sometimes they should not see so clearly that an obligation is to be imposed, let them, at least, use all the authority which springs from their office and the paternal affection they have for their spiritual sons, and so induce those who have not the necessary fitness to retire of their own free will. Let confessors remember the words of St. Alphonsus Liguori on a similar matter: "In general . . . in such cases the more severity the confessor uses with his penitents, the more will he help them towards their salvation; and on the contrary, the more cruel will he be the more he is benign." St. Thomas of Villanova called such over-kind confessors: *Impie pios*—"wickedly kind"; "such charity is contrary to charity."

#### BISHOP'S RESPONSIBILITY

The chief responsibility, however, rests with the Bishop, who according to the severe law of the Church "should not confer holy orders on anyone, unless from positive signs he is morally certain of canonical fitness; otherwise he not only sins grievously, but also places himself in danger of sharing in the sins of others." This canon is a clear echo of the warning of the Apostle to Timothy: "Impose not hands lightly on any man, neither be partaker of other men's sins." "To impose hands lightly," Our Predecessor St. Leo the Great expounds, "is to confer the sacerdotal dignity on persons not sufficiently approved: before maturity in age, before merit of obedience, before a time of testing, before trial of knowledge; and to be a partaker of other men's sins is for the ordainer to become as unworthy as the unworthy man whom he ordains"; for as St. John Chrysostom says, "You who have conferred the dignity upon him must take the responsibility of both his past and his future sins."

These are severe words, Venerable Brethren, yet still more dreadful is the responsibility which they declare, a responsibility which justified the great Bishop of Milan, St. Charles Borromeo in saying: "In this matter, my slightest



neglect can involve me in very great sin." Listen to the warning of Chrysostom whom We have just quoted: "Impose not hands after the first trial, nor after the second, nor yet the third, but only after frequent and careful observation and searching examination"; a warning which applies in an especial way to the question of the uprightness of life in candidates to the priesthood: "It is not enough," says the holy Bishop and Doctor St. Alphonsus de Liguori, "that the Bishop know nothing evil of the ordinand, but he must have positive evidence of his uprightness." Hence, do not fear to seem harsh if, in virtue of your rights and fulfilling your duty, you require such positive proofs of worthiness before ordination; or if you defer an ordination in case of doubt; because, as St. Gregory the Great eloquently teaches: "Cut from the forest beams fit for building; but do not place the weight of the building upon them at once. Delay many days, until they are dried and made fit for the purpose; because if this precaution be omitted, very soon they will break under the weight"; or, to use the short but clear expression of the Angelic Doctor: "Holiness must come before holy orders . . . hence the burden of orders should be placed only on walls seasoned with sanctity, freed of the damp of sins."

In short, let all canonical prescriptions be carefully obeyed, and let everyone put into practice the wise rules on this subject, which We caused to be promulgated a few years ago by the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments. Thus will the Church be saved much grief, and the faithful much scandal.

We have also had similar regulations sent to Religious; and while We urge upon all concerned their faithful observance, We now recall them to the attention of all heads of religious institutes, who have youths destined for the priesthood. They should consider as addressed also to them what We have recommended above concerning the formation of the clergy; since it is they who present their students for ordination, and the Bishop usually relies upon their judgment.

## NEED FOR SEVERITY

Bishops and religious superiors should not be deterred from this needful severity by fear of diminishing the number of priests for the diocese or institute. The Angelic Doctor St. Thomas long ago proposed this difficulty, and answers it with his usual lucidity and wisdom: "God never abandons His Church; and so the number of priests will be always sufficient for the needs of the faithful, provided the worthy are advanced and the unworthy sent away." The same Doctor and Saint, basing himself upon the severe words quoted by the Fourth Oecumenical Council of the Lateran, observes to Our purpose: "Should it ever become impossible to maintain the present number, it is better to have a few good priests than a multitude of bad ones." It was in this sense that We Ourselves, on the solemn occasion of the international pilgrimage of seminarists during the year of Our priestly Jubilee, addressing an imposing group of Italian Archbishops and Bishops, reaffirmed that one well trained priest is worth more than many trained badly or scarcely at all. For such would be not merely unreliable but a likely source of sorrow to the Church. What a terrifying account, Venerable Brethren, We shall have to give to the Prince of Shepherds, to the Supreme Bishop of souls, if we have handed over these souls to incompetent guides and incapable leaders.

Yet although it remains unquestionably true that mere numbers should not be the chief concern of those engaged in the education of the clergy, yet at the same time, all should do their utmost to increase the ranks of strong and zealous workers in the vineyard of the Lord; the more so, as the moral needs of society are growing greater instead of less. Of all the means to this noble end, the easiest and the most effective is prayer. This is, moreover, a means within the power of everyone. It should be assiduously used by all, as it was enjoined by Jesus Christ Himself: "The harvest, indeed, is great but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth laborers into His harvest." What prayer could be more acceptable to the Sacred Heart of our Saviour? What prayer is more likely to be answered as promptly and bounteously as this, which meets so nearly the burning desire of that Divine Heart?" "Ask therefore, and it will be given unto you";

ask for good and holy priests and Our Lord will not refuse to send them to His Church, as ever He has done throughout the centuries. It has been, in fact, precisely in times which seemed least propitious, that the number of priestly vocations increased. This is clear from Catholic hagiography of the nineteenth century, a century rich in splendid names on the rolls both of secular and regular clergy. One has only to think of those three splendid saints whom We Ourselves had the consolation of canonizing—St. John Mary Vianney, St. Joseph Benedict Cottolengo and St. John Bosco, men of truly lofty holiness, each in his special way.

Now God Himself liberally sows in the generous hearts of many young men this precious seed of vocation; but human means of cultivating this seed must not be neglected. There are innumerable ways and countless holy means suggested by the Holy Spirit; and all such salutary works which strive to preserve, promote and help priestly vocations, We praise and bless with all Our heart. "No matter how we seek," says the lovable Saint of charity, Vincent de Paul, "we shall always discover ourselves unable to contribute to anything more great than to the making of good priests." In truth nothing is more acceptable to God, of more honor to the Church, and more profitable to souls than the precious gift of a holy priest. If he who offers even a cup of water to one of the least of the disciples of Christ "shall not lose his reward," what reward will he receive who places, so to speak, into the pure hands of a young priest the sacred chalice, in which is contained the Blood of Redemption; who helps him to lift it up to heaven, a pledge of peace and of blessing for mankind?

### CATHOLIC ACTION

And here Our thoughts turn gladly to that Catholic Action, so much desired and promoted and defended by Us. For by Catholic Action the laity share in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church, and hence it cannot neglect this vital problem of priestly vocations. Comfort has filled Our heart to see the associates of Catholic Action everywhere distinguishing themselves in all fields of Christian activity, but especially in this. Certainly the richest reward of such activity is that really wonderful number of priestly and

religious vocations which continue to flourish in their organizations for the young. This shows that these organizations are both a fruitful ground of virtue, and also a well-guarded and well cultivated nursery, where the most beautiful and delicate flowers may develop without danger. May all members of Catholic Action feel the honor which thus falls on their association. Let them be persuaded that, in no better way than by this work for an increase in the ranks of the secular and regular clergy, can the Catholic laity really participate in the high dignity of the "kingly priesthood" which the Prince of the Apostles attributes to the whole body of the redeemed.

But the first and most natural place where the flowers of the sanctuary should almost spontaneously grow and bloom, remains always the truly and deeply Christian family. Most of the saintly Bishops and priests whose "praise the Church declares," owe the beginning of their vocation and their holiness to the example and teaching of a father strong in faith and manly virtues, of a pure and devoted mother, and of a family in which the love of God and neighbor, joined with simplicity of life, has reigned supreme. To this ordinary rule of Divine Providence exceptions are rare and only serve to prove the rule.

In an ideal home the parents, like Tobias and Sara, beg of God a numerous posterity "in which Thy name may be blessed forever," and receive it as a gift from heaven and a precious trust; they strive to instill into their children from their early years a holy fear of God, and true Christian piety; they foster a tender devotion to Jesus, the Blessed Sacrament and the Immaculate Virgin; they teach respect and veneration for holy places and persons. In such a home the children see in their parents a model of an upright, industrious and pious life; they see their parents holily loving each other in Our Lord, see them approach the Holy Sacraments frequently and not only obey the laws of the Church concerning abstinence and fasting, but also observe the spirit of voluntary Christian mortification; they see them pray at home, gathering around them all the family, that common prayer may rise more acceptably to heaven; they find them compassionate towards the distress of others and see them divide with the poor the much or the little they possess.

In such a home it is scarcely possible that, while all seek to copy their parents' example, none of the sons should listen to and accept the invitation of the Divine Master: "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men." Blessed are those Christian parents who are able to accept without fear the vocations of their sons, and see in them a signal honor for their family and a mark of the special love and providence of Our Lord. Still more blessed, if, as was often the case in ages of greater faith, they make such divine visitations the object of their earnest prayer.

#### PARENTAL OBJECTIONS

Yet it must be confessed with sadness that only too often parents seem to be unable to resign themselves to the priestly or religious vocations of their children. Such parents have no scruple in opposing the divine call with objections of all kinds; they even have recourse to means which can imperil not only the vocation to a more perfect state, but also the very conscience and the eternal salvation of those souls they ought to hold so dear. This happens all too often in the case even of parents who glory in being sincerely Christian and Catholic, especially in the higher and more cultured classes. This is a deplorable abuse, like that unfortunately prevalent in centuries past, of forcing children into the ecclesiastical career without the fitness of a vocation. It hardly does honor to those higher classes of society, which are on the whole so scantily represented in the ranks of the clergy. The lack of vocations in families of the middle and upper classes may be partly explained by the dissipations of modern life, the seductions, which especially in the larger cities, prematurely awaken the passions of youth; the schools in many places which scarcely conduce to the development of vocations. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that such a scarcity reveals a deplorable falling off of faith in the families themselves. Did they indeed look at things in the light of faith, what greater dignity could Christian parents desire for their sons, what ministry more noble, than that which, as We have said, is worthy of the veneration of men and angels? A long and sad experience has shown that a vocation betrayed—the word is not to be thought too strong—is a source of tears not only for the sons but also for the ill-advised parents;

and God grant that such tears be not so long delayed as to become eternal tears.

#### IV

And now, finally, to you, dear Children, Priests of the Most High, both secular and regular, the world over, We address Our words. You are "Our glory and joy," you, who with such generosity bear the "burden of the day and the heats," you, who so powerfully help Us and Our Brethren of the Episcopate in fulfilling the duty of feeding the flock of Christ. To you We send Our Paternal thanks and Our warmest encouragement. We know and fully appreciate your admirable zeal; and to it, in the needs of the present, We make this heartfelt appeal. These needs are becoming daily graver. All the more must your redeeming work grow and intensify; for "you are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world."

If, however, your work is to be blessed by God and produce abundant fruit, it must be rooted in holiness of life. Sanctity, as We said above, is the chief and most important endowment of the Catholic priest. Without it other gifts will not go far; with it, even supposing other gifts be meager, the priest can work marvels. We have the example of St. Joseph of Cupertino, and in times nearer to our own, of that humble Curé d'Ars, St. John Mary Vianney, of whom We have already spoken; whom We have willed to set up before all parish priests as their model and heavenly Patron. Therefore with the Apostle of the Gentiles, We say to you: "Behold your vocation"; and beholding it, you cannot fail to value ever more highly the grace given to you in ordination and to strive to "walk worthily of the vocation in which you are called."

#### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

In this striving you will be most wonderfully helped by a practice commended by Our Predecessor of holy memory Pius X. This commendation is contained in that "Exhortation to the Catholic Clergy," which he wrote with such unction and affection. This We warmly recommend you to read. In it, among all the means to preserve and increase the grace of the priesthood, he placed first the use of the Spiritual Exercises. This means We Ourselves have

also frequently recommended; and particularly in Our Encyclical Letter *Mens Nostra*, We have paternally and solemnly urged it upon all Our sons, but more especially upon Our Priests. As the year of Our priestly Jubilee drew to a close, We could find no better and more salutary reminder of that happy anniversary, than to give to Our sons an invitation, through the above-mentioned letter, to draw more copiously from the waters of life springing up into life everlasting, this inexhaustible fountain providentially opened by God to His Church. Again now, to you, Our Dear Brethren, who are all the closer to Us because you work more directly with Us to establish the kingdom of Christ upon earth, We believe We cannot give better proof of Our Fatherly affection than by exhorting you most fervently to make use of this means of sanctification, to the best of your abilities. Take for your guide those principles and norms laid down by Us in the above-mentioned Encyclical. It is not enough to withdraw to the sacred seclusion of the Spiritual Exercises only at the intervals and in the exact measure prescribed by ecclesiastical law but you should enter into retreat more often and for longer periods, as far as possible to you, and you should consecrate, in addition, a day of each month to more fervent prayer and greater recollection, according to the practice of priests of great zeal.

In such retreats and recollection even one who may have entered *in sortem Domini*, not by the straight way of a true vocation, but for earthly or less noble motives, will be able to "stir up the grace of God." For he, too, is now indissolubly bound to God and the Church, and so nothing remains for him but to follow the advice of St. Bernard: "If sanctity of life did not precede, let it at least follow . . . for the future make good your ways and ambitions and make holy your ministry." The grace of God, and specifically that grace proper to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, will not fail to lend aid, if he sincerely wishes to correct whatever was originally amiss in his purpose or conduct. However it may have come about that he undertook the obligations of the priesthood, the abiding grace of this divine sacrament will not be wanting in power to enable him to fulfill them.

Each and all of you, then, from the recollection and prayer of a retreat will come out fortified against the snares

of the world, quickened by lively zeal for the salvation of souls, and enkindled with the love of God, as befits priests in times like the present. For together with so much corruption and diabolical malice, there is everywhere felt a powerful religious and spiritual awakening, a breath of the Holy Spirit, sent forth over the world to sanctify it, and to renew with its creative force the face of the earth. Filled with the Holy Ghost you will communicate this love of God like a holy fire to all who approach you, becoming in a true sense bearers of Christ in a disordered society, which can hope for salvation from Jesus Christ alone, since He, and He alone, is ever "the true Saviour of the world."

#### PREPARATION URGED

Before concluding, We turn Our thoughts and Our words, with very special tenderness to you who are still in your studies for the priesthood; and urge you from the depth of Our heart to prepare yourselves with all seriousness for the great task to which God calls you. You are the hope of the Church and of the people, who look for so much, or rather everything, to you. For to you they look for that living and life-giving knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, in which is eternal life. In piety, purity, humility, obedience, discipline and study strive then to make yourselves priests after the Heart of God. We assure you that in the task of fitting yourselves for the priesthood by solid virtue and learning, no care, no diligence, no energy can be too great; because upon it so largely depend all your future apostolic labors. See to it that on the day of your ordination to the priesthood, the Church find you in fact such as she wishes you to be, that is "replenished with heavenly wisdom, irreproachable in life and established in the ways of grace," so that "the sweet odor of your life may be a delight to the Church of Christ, that both by word and good example you may build the house, that is, the family of God."

Only thus can you continue the glorious traditions of the Catholic priesthood and hasten that most auspicious hour when it will be given to all humanity to enjoy the fruits of the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ.

And before concluding Our letter, to you, Venerable Brethren in the the Episcopate, and through you to all Our



beloved sons of both clergy, We are happy to add a solemn proof of Our gratitude for the holy cooperation by which, under your guidance and example, this Holy Year of Redemption has been made so fruitful to souls. We wish to perpetuate the memory and the glory of that Priesthood, of which Ours and yours, Venerable Brethren, and that of all priests of Christ, is but a participation and continuation. We have thought it opportune, after consulting the Sacred Congregation of Rites, to prepare a special votive Mass, for Thursdays, according to liturgical rules: *De summo et æterno Iesu Christi Sacerdotio*, to honor "Jesus Christ, Supreme and Eternal Priest." It is Our pleasure and consolation to publish this Mass together with this, Our Encyclical Letter.

There only remains for Us, Venerable Brethren, to impart to all the Apostolic and paternal Benediction, which all expect and desire from their common Father. May it be a blessing of thanksgiving for all the benefits poured out by Divine Providence in these extraordinary Holy Years of the Redemption; may it be a blessing of good augury for the new year which is about to begin.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the twentieth day of December, 1935, in the fifty-sixth anniversary of Our priesthood, the fourteenth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS PP. XI.

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## Excerpt from the Encyclical of Pope Pius XI "On Atheistic Communism"

PRIESTS AS "FIRST-LINE MINISTERS"

**T**O apply the remedies thus briefly indicated to the task of saving the world as We have traced it above, Jesus Christ, our Divine King, has chosen priests as the first-line ministers and messengers of His gospel. Theirs is the duty, assigned to them by a special vocation, under the direction

of their bishops and in filial obedience to the Vicar of Christ on earth, of keeping alight in the world the torch of Faith, and of filling the hearts of the Faithful with that supernatural trust which has aided the Church to fight and win so many other battles in the name of Christ: "This is the victory which overcometh the world, our Faith."

"GO TO THE WORKINGMEN"

To priests in a special way We recommend anew the oft-repeated counsel of Our Predecessor, Leo XIII, to go to the workingman. We make this advice Our own, and, faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church, We thus complete it: "Go to the workingman, especially where he is poor; and in general, go to the poor." The poor are obviously more exposed than others to the wiles of agitators who, taking advantage of their extreme need, kindle their hearts to envy of the rich and urge them to seize by force what fortune seems to have denied them unjustly. If the priest will not go to the workingman and to the poor, to warn them or to disabuse them of prejudice and false theory, they will become an easy prey for the apostles of Communism.

Indisputably much has been done in this direction, especially after the publication of the Encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. We are happy to voice Our paternal approval of the zealous pastoral activity manifested by so many bishops and priests who have with due prudence and caution, been planning and applying new methods of apostolate more adapted to modern needs. But for the solution of our present problem, all this effort is still inadequate. When our country is in danger, everything not strictly necessary, everything not bearing directly on the urgent matter of unified defense, takes second place. So we must act in today's crisis. Every other enterprise, however attractive and helpful, must yield before the vital need of protecting the very foundation of the Faith and of Christian civilization. Let our parish priests, therefore, while providing of course for the normal needs of the Faithful, dedicate the better part of their endeavors and their zeal to winning back the laboring masses to Christ and to His Church. Let them work to infuse the Christian spirit into quarters where

it is least at home. The willing response of the masses, and results far exceeding their expectations, will not fail to reward them for their strenuous pioneer labor. This has been and continues to be our experience in Rome and in other capitals, where zealous parish communities are being formed as new churches are built in the suburban districts, and real miracles are being worked in the conversion of people whose hostility to religion has been due solely to the fact that they did not know it.

#### PRIEST'S EXAMPLE

But the most efficacious means of apostolate among the poor and lowly is the priest's example, the practice of all those sacerdotal virtues which We have described in Our Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*. Especially needful, however, for the present situation is the shining example of a life which is humble, poor and disinterested, in imitation of a Divine Master who could say to the world with divine simplicity: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head." A priest who is really poor and disinterested in the Gospel sense may work among his flock marvels, recalling a St. Vincent de Paul, a Curé of Ars, a Cottolengo, a Don Bosco and so many others; while an avaricious and selfish priest, as We have noted in the above-mentioned Encyclical, even though he should not plunge with Judas to the abyss of treason, will never be more than empty "sounding brass" and a useless "tinkling cymbal." Too often, indeed, he will be a hindrance rather than an instrument of grace in the midst of his people. Furthermore, where a secular priest or Religious is obliged by his office to administer temporal property, let him remember that he is not only to observe scrupulously all that charity and justice prescribe, but that he has a special obligation to conduct himself in very truth as a father of the poor.

## Excerpt from the Encyclical of Pope Pius XI “On the Reconstruction of the Social Order”

### SOCIAL STUDIES FOR SEMINARIANS

NO easy task is here imposed upon the clergy, wherefore all candidates for the sacred priesthood must be adequately prepared to meet it by intense study of social matters. It is particularly necessary, however, that they whom you specially select and devote to this work show themselves endowed with a keen sense of justice ready to oppose with real manly constancy unjust claims and unjust actions; that they avoid every extreme with consummate prudence and discretion; above all, that they be thoroughly imbued with the charity of Christ, which alone has power to incline men's hearts and wills firmly and gently to the laws of equity and justice. This course, already productive of success in the past, we must follow now with alacrity.

Further, We earnestly exhort in the Lord the beloved sons who are chosen for this task, to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the formation of the men entrusted to them. In the execution of this most priestly and apostolic work, let them make opportune use of the powerful resources of Christian training, by instructing youth, by founding Christian associations, by forming study circles on Christian lines.

### RETREATS TO FOSTER ZEAL

Above all, let them hold in high esteem and employ with diligence for the benefit of their disciples the spiritual exercises, a most precious means of personal and of social reform, as We said in Our Encyclical “Mens Nostra.” These exercises We declared in express terms to be most useful for the laity in general and especially for workingmen, and We warmly recommended them; for in that school of the spirit not only are excellent Christians formed, but real apostles of every state of life are trained and enkindled with the fire of

the Heart of Christ. From that school they will go forth, as the Apostles from the cenacle in Jerusalem, strong in faith, unconquerable in steadfastness under trials, aflame with zeal, eager only for the spread in every way of the Kingdom of Christ.

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## Excerpt from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Pius XI On the Mexican Episcopate

AND precisely to revive your confidence in Divine Aid, and to encourage you to continue in the practice of a fervent Christian life, We address this letter to you, and We avail ourselves of this occasion to remind you how, under the present difficult circumstances, the most efficacious means for a Christian restoration are—and also among you—above all the holiness of priests, and in the second place the correct formation of the laity in order that they may be capable of cooperating fruitfully in the apostolate of the Hierarchy, so much more necessary in Mexico both because of the vastness of the territory and because of other circumstances known to all.

Our thought, therefore, is fixed in the first place on those who must be the light that illuminates, the salt which conserves, the good leaven which penetrates the entire mass of the Faithful: We mean your priests. In truth, We know how tenaciously and at the cost of how many sacrifices you care for the selection and increase of sacerdotal vocations, in the midst of all sorts of difficulties, well persuaded as you are thus to provide the solution of a vital problem, truly the most vital of all the problems relating to the future of the Church. In view of the almost absolute impossibility of having in your own country well-ordered and tranquil seminaries, you have found in this city an ample and gracious refuge in the South American *Pio Latino* College, which has formed and continues to form in science and virtue so many worthy priests and which, for its precious work, is particularly dear to Us. But since in many cases it has been impossible to send your students to Rome, you have worked

solicitously to find an asylum in the hospitality of a great neighboring nation.

#### EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

In congratulating you on this praiseworthy initiative, which is already becoming a consoling reality, We again express Our gratitude to all those who have so generously tendered you hospitality and assistance. And with paternal instinct We remind you again on this occasion of Our precise wish that you make known and explain suitably, not only to the clerics, but to all your priests, Our Encyclical *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, which explains Our thoughts on this, the gravest and most important among the grave and important subjects treated by Us.

The Mexican priests thus formed according to the Heart of Jesus Christ will feel that in the actual conditions of their country (of which We spoke in Our Apostolic Letter *Paterna Sane Sollicitudo* of February 2, 1926)—which are so similar to those of the early times of the Church, when the Apostles appealed for the collaboration of the laity—it would be very difficult to reconquer for Christ so many misguided souls without the providential assistance which the laity give by means of Catholic Action. More so since at times grace prepares among them generous souls ready to develop most fruitful activity if they encounter a learned and holy clergy capable of understanding and guiding them.

Therefore, to the Mexican priests, who have dedicated their lives to the service of Jesus Christ, of the Church and of souls—to these We direct Our first and warmest appeal, that they will generously second Our and your solicitude for the progress of Catholic Action, dedicating to it their best efforts and most opportune diligence. The methods of an effective collaboration of the laity with your action will never be lacking if the priests will devote themselves with careful attention to cultivating the Christian people by means of wise spiritual direction and careful religious instructions, not diluted in vain discourses, but nourished with sound doctrine taken from Holy Scripture and full of unction and of force.

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