



“Making Memory of His Legacy to Strengthen Our Identity”

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Theme: “I will give you shepherds! The Splendor of Consecrated Life!”

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATIONS "PASTORES DABO VOBIS" AND "VITA CONSECRATA"

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

I. The Baptism of Our Lord

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. He came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17)

19. *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk. 4:18). The Spirit is not simply "upon" the Messiah, but he "fills" him, penetrating every part of him and reaching to the very depths of all that he is and does. Indeed, the Spirit is the principle of the "consecration" and "mission" of the Messiah: "Because he has anointed me and sent me to preach good news to the poor" (cf. Lk. 4:18). Through the Spirit, Jesus belongs totally and exclusively to God and shares in the infinite holiness of God, who calls him, chooses him and sends him forth. In this way the Spirit of the Lord is revealed as the source of holiness and of the call to holiness.*

20. *The Council's Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry gives us a particularly rich and thought - provoking synthesis of the priest's "spiritual life" and of the gift and duty to become "saints": "By the sacrament of orders priests are configured to Christ the priest so that as ministers of the head and co - workers with the episcopal order they may build up and establish his whole body which is the Church. Like all Christians they have already received in the consecration of baptism the sign and gift of their great calling and grace which enables and obliges them even in the midst of human weakness to seek perfection (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9), according to the Lord's word: 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). But priests are bound in a special way to strive for this perfection, since they are consecrated to God in a new way by their ordination.*

They have become living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, so that through the ages they, can accomplish his wonderful work of reuniting the whole human race with heavenly power. Therefore, since every priest in his own way represents the person of Christ himself, he is endowed with a special grace. By this grace the priest, through his service of the people committed to his care and all the People of God, is able the better to pursue the perfection of Christ, whose place he takes. The human weakness of his flesh is remedied by the holiness of him who became for us a high priest 'holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners' (Heb. 7:26)."(41). The conciliar text goes on to point out some elements

necessary for defining what constitutes the "specific quality" of the priest's spiritual life. These are elements connected with the priest's "consecration," which configures him to Christ the head and shepherd of the Church, with the "mission" or ministry peculiar to the priest; which equips and obliges him to be a "living instrument of Christ the eternal priest" and to act "in the name and in the person of Christ himself" and with his entire "life," called to manifest and witness in a fundamental way the "radicalism of the Gospel."

Mother of Priests and all consecrated life, pray for us!

II. The Wedding at Cana

“There was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ [And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come, ‘His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.’” (John 2:1-5)

28. Mary is the one who, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, most perfectly reflects the divine beauty. "All beautiful" is the title with which the Church invokes her. "The relationship with Mary most holy, which for every believer stems from his or her union with Christ, is even more pronounced in the life of consecrated persons ... Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person and for the solidity, unity and progress of the whole community".

Mary in fact is the sublime example of perfect consecration, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of the primacy of God's initiative. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the model of the acceptance of grace by human creatures. Having lived with Jesus and Joseph in the hidden years of Nazareth, and present at her Son's side at crucial moments of his public life, the Blessed Virgin teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service. In Mary, "the temple of the Holy Spirit," all the splendor of the new creation shines forth. Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit, in the knowledge that acceptance of the "virginal and humble life" of Christ also means imitation of Mary's way of life. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, consecrated persons also find a Mother who is altogether unique. Indeed, if the new motherhood conferred on Mary at Calvary is a gift for all Christians, it has a specific value for those who have completely consecrated their lives to Christ.

"Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:27): Jesus' words to the disciple "whom he loved" (Jn 19:26) are particularly significant for the lives of consecrated persons. They, like John, are called to take the Blessed Virgin Mary to themselves (cf. Jn 19:27), loving her and imitating her in the radical manner which befits their vocation, and experiencing in return her special motherly love. The Blessed Virgin shares with them the love which enables them to offer their lives every day for Christ and to cooperate with him in the salvation of the world. Hence a filial relationship to Mary is the royal road to fidelity to one's vocation and a most effective help for advancing in that vocation and living it fully.

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III. The Proclamation of the Kingdom

"After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

26. The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason, the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) - such that his words and his choices and attitudes may become ever more a reflection, a proclamation and a witness to the Gospel.

Only if he "abides" in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free, overcoming every conditioning which is contrary or foreign to the Gospel (cf. Jn. 8:31-32). The priest ought to be the first "believer" in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not "his," but those of the One who sent him. He is not the master of the word, but its servant. He is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest - like every other member of the Church - ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized.(67) He proclaims the word in his capacity as "minister," as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. As a result, in order that he himself may possess and give to the faithful the guarantee that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special sensitivity, love and docility to the living tradition of the Church and to her magisterium. These are not foreign to the word, but serve its proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning.

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IV. The Transfiguration of Our Lord

"Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with them. A bright cloud cast a shadow over them, and from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" (Matthew 17:1-5)

14. The evangelical basis of consecrated life is to be sought in the special relationship which Jesus, in his earthly life, established with some of his disciples. He called them not only to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own lives, but also to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own way of life.

Many of the baptized throughout history have been invited to live such a life "in the image of Christ". But this is possible only on the basis of a special vocation and in virtue of a particular gift of the Spirit. For in such a life baptismal consecration develops into a radical response in the following of Christ through acceptance of the evangelical counsels, the first and essential of which is the sacred bond of chastity for

the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. This special way of "following Christ", at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: it expresses in a particularly vivid way the Trinitarian nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that eschatological fulfillment towards which the whole Church is tending. In the Gospel, many of Christ's words and actions shed light on the meaning of this special vocation. But for an overall picture of its essential characteristics, it is singularly helpful to fix our gaze on Christ's radiant face in the mystery of the Transfiguration.

*The event of the Transfiguration marks a decisive moment in the ministry of Jesus. It is a revelatory event which strengthens the faith in the disciples' hearts, prepares them for the tragedy of the Cross and prefigures the glory of the Resurrection. Like the three chosen disciples, the Church contemplates the transfigured face of Christ in order to be confirmed in faith and to avoid being dismayed at his disfigured face on the Cross. In both cases, she is the Bride before her Spouse, sharing in his mystery and surrounded by his light. This light shines on all the Church's children. But those who are called to the consecrated life have a special experience of the light which shines forth from the Incarnate Word. For the profession of the evangelical counsels makes them a kind of sign and prophetic statement for the community of the brethren and for the world; consequently they can echo in a particular way the ecstatic words spoken by Peter: "**Lord, it is well that we are here**" (Mt 17:4). These words bespeak the Christocentric orientation of the whole Christian life. But they also eloquently express the radical nature of the vocation to the consecrated life: how good it is for us to be with you, to devote ourselves to you, to make you the one focus of our lives! Truly those who have been given the grace of this special communion of love with Christ feel as it were caught up in his splendor: he is "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45:2), the One beyond compare.*

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V. The Institution of the Eucharist

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28)

48. The high point of Christian prayer is the Eucharist, which in its turn is to be seen as the "summit and source" of the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours. A totally necessary aspect of the formation of every Christian, and in particular of every priest, is liturgical formation, in the full sense of becoming inserted in a living way in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and is present and active in the Church's sacraments. Communion with God, which is the hinge on which the whole of the spiritual life turns, is the gift and fruit of the sacraments. At the same time it is a task and responsibility which the sacraments entrust to the freedom of the believer, so that one may live this same communion in the decisions, choices, attitudes and actions of daily existence. In this sense, the "grace" which "renews" Christian living is the grace of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and continues to pour out his holy and sanctifying Spirit in the sacraments. In the same way, the "new law" which should guide and govern the life of the Christian is written by the sacraments in the "new heart." And it is a law of charity toward God and humanity, as a response and prolonging of the charity of God toward humanity signified and communicated by the sacraments. It is thus possible to understand at once the value of a "full, conscious and active participation"(142) in sacramental celebrations for the gift and task of that "pastoral charity" which is the soul of the priestly ministry.

This applies above all to sharing in the Eucharist, the memorial of the sacrificial death of Christ and of his glorious resurrection, the "sacrament of piety, sign of unity, bond of charity, (143)the paschal banquet "in which Christ is received, the soul is filled with grace and we are given a pledge of the glory that is to be ours."(144) For priests, as ministers of sacred things, are first and foremost ministers of the sacrifice of the Mass:(145) The role is utterly irreplaceable, because without the priest there can be no Eucharistic offering.

This explains the essential importance of the Eucharist for the priest's life and ministry and, as a result, in the spiritual formation of candidates for the priesthood. To be utterly frank and clear, I would like to say once again: "It is fitting that seminarians take part every day in the Eucharistic celebration, in such a way that afterward they will take up as a rule of their priestly life this daily celebration. They should, moreover, be trained to consider the Eucharistic celebration as the essential moment of their day, in which they will take an active part and at which they will never be satisfied with a merely habitual attendance. Finally, candidates to the priesthood will be trained to share in the intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters: gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because the Eucharist is thanksgiving; an attitude of self - offering, which will impel them to unite the offering of themselves to the Eucharistic offering of Christ; charity nourished by a sacrament which is a sign of unity and sharing; the yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration before Christ, who is really present under the Eucharistic species."(146)

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Totus Tuus!