

TO THE CATHOLIC CLERGY ON PRIESTLY SANCTITY

HAERENT ANIMO

Apostolic Exhortation given by Pope St. Pius X on August 4, 1908.

This Exhortation, which the Holy Father addressed to the catholic clergy on the occasion of the Golden jubilee of his priesthood, was written entirely in his own hand in the space of some weeks. It is a document which truly comes from the heart of the Pontiff. In it he presents his ideal of the priesthood, and reveals the serious anxieties which he experienced at a time when the modernist crisis was still a source of perturbation to the clergy;[1] the Exhortation rounds off the numerous earlier instructions of the Holy Father. Saint Pius X was fond of recommending this Exhortation to the members of the episcopate: "This document, in which we opened our heart to all sacred ministers, make it your business to recall it and explain it for the benefit of the clerics for whom you are responsible. Besides, realize thoroughly and hold fast to this truth: when you have a body of clergy who conform to the ideal outlined in that Exhortation, you will certainly find your pastoral care greatly lightened, and the fruits of your apostolate will be much more abundant."[2]

Deeply imprinted upon our mind are those dread words which the Apostle of the gentiles wrote to the Hebrews to remind them of the obedience which they owed to their superiors: They keep watch as having to render an account of your souls.[3]

These grave words apply, no doubt, to all who have authority in the Church, but they apply in a special way to us who, despite our unworthiness, by the grace of God exercise supreme power within the Church. Therefore, with unceasing solicitude, our thoughts and endeavors are constantly directed to the promotion of the well-being and growth of the flock of the Lord.

Our first and chief concern is that all who are invested with the priestly ministry should be in every way fitted for the discharge of their responsibilities. For we are fully convinced that it is here that hope lies for the welfare and progress of religious life.

Hence it is that, ever since our elevation to the office of supreme Pontiff, we have felt it a duty, notwithstanding the manifest and numerous proofs of the high quality of the clergy as a whole, to urge with all earnestness our venerable brethren the bishops of the whole catholic world, to devote themselves unceasingly and efficaciously to the formation of Christ in those who, by their calling, have the responsibility of forming Christ in others.[4]

We are well aware of the eagerness with which the episcopate have carried out this task. We know the watchful care and unwearied energy with which they seek to form the clergy in the ways of virtue, and for this we wish not so much to praise them as to render them public thanks.

But though it is a matter for congratulation that, as a result of the diligence of the bishops, so many priests are animated by heavenly fervor to rekindle or strengthen in their souls the flame of divine grace which they received by the imposition of hands, we must deplore the fact that there are others in different countries who do not show themselves worthy to be taken as models by the christian people who rightly look to them for a genuine model of christian virtue.[5]

It is to these priests that we wish to open our heart in this Letter; it is a father's loving heart which beats anxiously as he looks upon an ailing child. Our love for them inspires us to add our own appeal to the appeals of their own bishops. And while our appeal is intended above all to recall the erring to the right path and to spur the lukewarm to fresh endeavor, we would wish it to serve as an encouragement to others also. We point out the path which each one must strive to follow with constantly growing fervor, so that he may become truly a man of God,[6] as the Apostle so concisely expresses it, and fulfill the legitimate expectations of the Church.

We have nothing to say which you have not already heard, no doctrine to propound that is new to anyone; but we treat of matters which it is necessary for everyone to bear in mind, and God inspires us with the hope that our message will not fail to bear abundant fruit.

Our earnest appeal to you is this: Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and sanctity of truth;[7] that will be the most excellent and most acceptable gift which you could offer to us on this fiftieth anniversary of our ordination.

For our own part, when we review before God with a contrite heart and in a spirit of humility[8] the years passed in the priesthood, we will feel that we are making reparation in some measure for the human frailties which we have cause to regret, by thus admonishing and exhorting you to walk worthily of God, in all things pleasing.[9]

In this exhortation, it is not your personal welfare alone that we are striving to secure, but the common welfare of catholic peoples; the one cannot be separated from the other. For the priest cannot be good or bad for himself alone; his conduct and way of life have far-reaching consequences for the people. A truly good priest is an immense gift wherever he may be.

I. THE OBLIGATION OF PRIESTLY SANCTITY

Therefore, beloved sons, we will begin this exhortation by stimulating you to that sanctity of life which the dignity of your office demands.

Anyone who exercises the priestly ministry exercises it not for himself alone, but for others. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in the things that pertain to God.[10] Christ himself taught that lesson when he compared the priest to salt and to light, in order to show the nature of the priestly ministry. The priest then is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Everyone knows that he fulfills this function chiefly by the teaching of christian truth; and who can be unaware that this ministry of teaching is practically useless if the priest fails to confirm by the example of his life the truths which he teaches? Those who hear him might say, insultingly it is true, but not without justification: They profess that they know God but in their works they deny him;[11] they will refuse to accept his teaching and will derive no benefit from the light of the priest.

Christ himself, the model of priests, taught first by the example of his deeds and then by his words: Jesus began to do and then to teach.[12]

Likewise, a priest who neglects his own sanctification can never be the salt of the earth; what is corrupt and contaminated is utterly incapable of preserving from corruption; where sanctity is lacking, there corruption will inevitably find its way. Hence Christ, continuing this comparison, calls such priests salt that has lost its savor, which is good for nothing any more, but to be cast out and to be trodden on by men.[13]

These truths are all the more evident inasmuch as we exercise the priestly ministry not in our own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostle said: Let man so consider us as the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God;[14] for Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors.[15] This is the reason that Christ has numbered us not among his servants but as his friends. I will not

now call you servants; . . . but I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard from my Father I have made known to you; . . . I have chosen you and appointed you that you should go and bring forth fruit.[16]

We have, therefore, to take the place of Christ: the mission which he has given to us we must fulfill with that same purpose that he intended. True friendship consists in unity of mind and will, identity of likes and dislikes; therefore, as friends of Jesus Christ, we are bound to have that mind in us which was in Jesus Christ who is holy, innocent, undefiled.[17] As his envoys, we must win the minds of men for his doctrine and his law by first observing them ourselves; sharing as we do in his power to deliver souls from the bondage of sin, we must strive by every means to avoid becoming entangled in these toils of sin.

But it is particularly as the ministers of Jesus Christ in the great sacrifice which is constantly renewed with abiding power for the salvation of the world, that we have the duty of conforming our minds to that spirit in which he offered himself as an unspotted victim to God on the altar of the Cross. In the Old Law, though victims were only shadowy figures and symbols, sanctity of a high degree was demanded of the priest; what then of us, now that the victim is Christ himself? "How pure should not he be who shares in this sacrifice! More resplendent than the sun must be the hand that divides this Flesh, the mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by this Blood!"[18]

Saint Charles Borromeo gave apt expression to this thought when, in his discourses to the clergy, he declared: "If we would only bear in mind, dearly beloved brethren, the exalted character of the things that the Lord God has placed in our hands, what unbounded influence would not this have in impelling us to lead lives worthy of ecclesiastics! Has not the Lord placed everything in my hand, when he put there his only-begotten Son, coeternal and coequal with himself? In my hand he has placed all his treasures, his sacraments, his graces; he has placed there souls, than whom nothing can be dearer to him; in his love he has preferred them to himself, and redeemed them by his Blood; he has placed heaven in my hand, and it is in my power to open and close it to others . . . How, then, can I be so ungrateful for such condescension and love as to sin against him, to offend his honor, to pollute this body which is his? How can I come to defile this high dignity, this life consecrated to his service?"

It is well to speak at greater length on this holiness of life, which is the object of the unfailing solicitude of the Church. This is the purpose for which seminaries have been founded; within their walls young men who hope to be priests are trained in letters and other branches of learning, but even more important is the training in piety which they also receive there from their tender years. And then, when the Church gradually and at long intervals promotes candidates to Orders, like a watchful parent she never fails to exhort them to sanctity.

It is a source of joy to recall her words on these occasions.

When we were first enrolled in the army of the Church, she sought from us the formal declaration: The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me.[19] St. Jerome tells us that with these words "the cleric is reminded that one who is the portion of the Lord, or who has the Lord as his portion, must show himself to be such a one as possesses the Lord and is possessed by him." [20]

How solemnly the Church addresses those who are about to be promoted sub-deacons! "You must consider repeatedly and with all attention the office which of your own volition you seek to-day . . . if you receive this Order, you cannot afterwards revoke your decision, you must remain always in the service of God and, with his help, observe chastity." And finally: "If up to now you have been negligent in relation to the Church, henceforth you must be diligent; if hitherto you have been somnolent, henceforth you must be vigilant . . . if up to now your life has been unseemly, henceforth you must be chaste; . . . Consider the ministry which is entrusted to you!" For those who are about

to be raised to the diaconate, the Church prays to God through the mouth of the bishop: "May they have in abundance the pattern of every virtue, authority that is unassuming, constancy in chastity, the purity of innocence, and the observance of spiritual discipline. May thy commands shine forth through their conduct, and may the people find a saintly model in their exemplary chastity."

The admonition addressed to those who are about to be ordained priests is even more moving: "It is with great fear that one must approach this high dignity, and care must be taken that those chosen for it are recommended by heavenly wisdom, blameless life and sustained observance of justice . . . Let the fragrance of your life be a joy to the Church of Christ, so that by your preaching and example you may build up the house, that is, the family of God." Above all the Church stresses the solemn words: Imitate that which you handle, an injunction which fully agrees with the command of St. Paul: That we may present every man perfect in Jesus Christ.[21]

Since this is the mind of the Church on the life of a priest, one cannot be surprised at the complete unanimity of the Fathers and Doctors on this matter; it might indeed be thought that they are guilty of exaggeration, but a careful examination will lead to the conclusion that they taught nothing that was not entirely true and correct. Their teaching can be summarized thus: there should be as much difference between the priest and any other upright man as there is between heaven and earth; consequently, the priest must see to it that his life is free not merely from grave faults but even from the slightest faults.[22] The Council of Trent made the teaching of these venerable men its own when it warned clerics to avoid "even venial faults which in their case would be very grave." [23] These faults are grave, not in themselves, but in relation to the one who commits them; for to him, even more than to the sacred edifice, are applicable the words: Holiness becometh thy house.[23]a

II. NATURE OF PRIESTLY HOLINESS

We must now consider what is the nature of this sanctity, which the priest cannot lack without being culpable; ignorance or misunderstanding of it leaves one exposed to grave peril.

There are some who think, and even declare openly, that the true measure of the merits of a priest is his dedication to the service of others; consequently, with an almost complete disregard for the cultivation of the virtues which lead to the personal sanctification of the priest (these they describe as passive virtues), they assert that all his energies and fervor should be directed to the development and practice of what they call the active virtues. One can only be astonished by this gravely erroneous and pernicious teaching.

Our predecessor of happy memory in his wisdom spoke as follows of this teaching:[24] "To maintain that some christian virtues are more suited to one period than to another is to forget the words of the Apostle: Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.[25] Christ is the teacher and the model of all sanctity; all who desire to take their place in the abode of the blessed must adapt their conduct to the standard which he has laid down. Now Christ does not change with the passing of the centuries: He is the same yesterday and to-day and forever.[26] The words: Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart,[27] apply to men of every age; at all times Christ reveals himself obedient unto death;[28] true for every age are the words of the Apostle: They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the vices and concupiscences." [29]

These passages apply, no doubt, to all the faithful, but they apply more especially to priests. Let priests take as directed particularly to themselves the further words which were spoken by our predecessor in his apostolic zeal: "Would that at the present day there were many more who cultivated these virtues as did the saints of former times, who by their humility, their obedience, their abstinence, were mighty in work and word, to the great benefit not only of religion but also of public and civil life." [30]

It is not irrelevant to note here that Leo XIII in his wisdom made special mention of the virtue of abstinence, which we call self-denial, in the words of the Gospel. He was quite right to do so, for it is from self-denial chiefly that the strength and power and fruit of every priestly function derive; it is when this virtue is neglected that there appears in the priest's conduct whatever may be of a nature to cause offense to the eyes and hearts of the faithful. If one acts for the sake of filthy lucre, or becomes involved in worldly affairs,[31] or seeks for the highest places and despises others, or follows merely human counsel, or seeks to please men, or trusts in the persuasive words of human wisdom, this is the result of neglect of the command of Christ and of the refusal to accept the condition laid down by him: If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself.[32]

While insisting on these truths, we would likewise admonish the priest that in the last analysis, it is not for himself alone that he has to sanctify himself, for he is the workman whom Christ went out . . . to hire into his vineyard.[33] Therefore, it is his duty to uproot unfruitful plants and to sow useful ones, to water the crop and to guard lest the enemy sow cockle among it. Consequently, the priest must be careful not to allow an unbalanced concern for personal perfection to lead him to overlook any part of the duties of his office which are conducive to the welfare of others. These duties include the preaching of the word of God, the hearing of confessions, assisting the sick, especially the dying, the instruction of those who are ignorant of the faith, the consolation of the sorrowing, leading back the erring, in a word, the imitation in every respect of Christ who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil.[34]

In the midst of all these duties, the priest shall have ever present to his mind the striking admonition given by St. Paul: Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.[35] It may be that we go and sow the seed with tears; it may be that we tend its growth at the cost of heavy labor; but to make it germinate and yield the hoped for fruit, that depends on God alone and his powerful assistance. This further point also is worthy of profound consideration, namely that men are but the instruments whom God employs for the salvation of souls; they must, therefore, be instruments fit to be employed by God. And how is this to be achieved? Do we imagine that God is influenced by any inborn or acquired excellence of ours, to make use of our help for the extension of his glory? By no means; for it is written: God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world God has chosen to confound the strong, and the humble and contemptible things of the world God has chosen, the things that are not, in order to bring to nought the things that are.[36]

There is, indeed, only one thing that unites man to God, one thing that makes him pleasing to God and a not unworthy dispenser of his mercy; and that one thing is holiness of life and conduct. If this holiness, which is the true supereminent knowledge of Jesus Christ, is wanting in the priest, then everything is wanting. Without this, even the resources of profound learning (which we strive to promote among the clergy), or exceptional competence in practical affairs, though they may bring some benefit to the Church or to individuals, are not infrequently the cause of deplorable damage to them.

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence from every age that even the humblest priest, provided his life has the adornment of overflowing sanctity, can undertake and accomplish marvelous works for the spiritual welfare of the people of God; an outstanding example in recent times is John Baptist Vianney, a model pastor of souls, to whom we are happy to have decreed the honors of the Blessed in heaven.[37]

Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation demands, men crucified to the world and to whom the world has been crucified, men walking in newness of life who, in the words of St. Paul, show themselves as ministers of God in labors, in vigils, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere charity, in the word of truth;[38] men who seek only heavenly things and strive by every means to lead others to them.

II MEANS OF ACQUIRING PRIESTLY SANCTITY

1 PRAYER, AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION OF SANCTITY.

Since, as everyone realizes, holiness of life is the fruit of the exercise of the will inasmuch as it is strengthened by the aid of divine grace, God has made abundant provision lest we should at any time lack the gift of grace, if we desire it. We can obtain it, in the first place, by constant prayer.

There is, in fact, such a necessary link between holiness and prayer that the one cannot exist without the other.

The words of Chrysostom on this matter are an exact expression of the truth: "I consider that it is obvious to everyone that it is impossible to live virtuously without the aid of prayer;"[39] and Augustine sums up shrewdly: "He truly knows how to live rightly, who rightly knows how to pray."[40]

Christ himself, by his constant exhortations and especially by his example, has even more firmly inculcated these truths. To pray he withdrew into desert places or climbed the mountain alone; he spent whole nights absorbed in prayer; he paid many visits to the temple; even when the crowds thronged around him, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed openly before them; when nailed to the Cross, in the agony of death, he supplicated the Father with a strong cry and tears.

Let us be convinced, therefore, that a priest must be specially devoted to the practice of prayer if he is to maintain worthily his dignity and to fulfill his duty. All too frequently one must deplore the fact that prayer is a matter of routine rather than of genuine fervor; the Psalms are recited at the appointed times[41] in a negligent manner, a few short prayers are said in between; there is no further thought of consecrating part of the day to speaking with God, with pious aspirations to him. And it is the priest, more than any other, who is bound to obey scrupulously the command of Christ: We ought always pray,[42] a command which Paul so insistently inculcated: Be instant in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving;[43] pray without ceasing.[44]

How numerous are the opportunities of turning to God in prayer which present themselves daily to the soul which is eager for its own sanctification and the salvation of others! Anguish of soul, the persistent onslaught of temptation, our lack of virtue, slackness and failure in our works, our many offenses and negligences, fear of the divine judgment, all these should move us to approach the Lord with tears, in order to obtain help from him and also to increase without difficulty the treasure of our merit in his eyes.

Nor should our tearful supplication be for ourselves alone. In the deluge of crime, which spreads far and wide, we especially should implore and pray for divine clemency; we should appeal insistently to Christ who in his infinite mercy lavishes his graces in his wonderful Sacrament: Spare, O Lord, spare thy people.

2 THE OBLIGATION OF DAILY MEDITATION

A point of capital importance is that a certain time should be given daily to meditation on the eternal truths. No priest can neglect this practice without incurring a grave charge of negligence and without detriment to his soul. The saintly abbot, Bernard, when writing to Eugene III, his former pupil who had become Roman Pontiff, frankly and emphatically admonished him never to omit daily divine meditation; he would not admit as an excusing cause even the many weighty cares which the supreme pontificate involves. In justification of this advice he enumerated with great prudence the benefits of the practice of meditation: "Meditation purifies the source from which it comes, the mind. It controls affections, guides our acts, corrects excesses, rules our conduct, introduces order and dignity into our lives; it bestows understanding of things divine and human. It brings clarity where

there is confusion, binds what is torn apart, gathers what is scattered, investigates what is hidden, seeks out the truth, weighs what has the appearance of truth, and shows up what is pretense and falsehood. It plans future action and reviews the past, so that nothing remains in the mind that has not been corrected or that stands in need of correction. When affairs are prospering it anticipates the onset of adversity, and when adversity comes it seems not to feel it, in this it displays in turn prudence and fortitude."[45]

This summary of the benefits which meditation is calculated to bring is an instructive reminder not only of its salutary effect in every department, but also of its absolute necessity.

Despite the high dignity of the various functions of the priestly office and the veneration which they deserve, frequent exercise of these functions may lead those who discharge them to treat them with less respect than is their due. From a gradual decline in fervor it is an easy step to carelessness and even to distaste for the most sacred things. In addition, a priest cannot avoid daily contact with a corrupt society; frequently, in the very exercise of pastoral charity, he must fear the insidious attacks of the infernal serpent. Is it not all too easy even for religious souls to be tarnished by contact with the world?[46] It is evident, therefore, that there is a grave and urgent need for the priest to turn daily to the contemplation of the eternal truths, so that his mind and will may gain new strength to stand firm against every enticement to evil.

Moreover, it is the strict duty of the priest to have a mind for heavenly things, to teach them, to inculcate them; in the regulation of his whole life he must be so much superior to human considerations that whatever he does in the discharge of his sacred office will be done in accordance with God, under the impulse and guidance of faith; it is fitting then that he should possess a certain aptitude to rise above earthly considerations and strive for heavenly things. Nothing is more conducive to the acquisition and strengthening of this disposition of soul, this quasi-natural union with God, than daily meditation; it is unnecessary to dwell upon this truth which every prudent person clearly realizes.

The life of a priest who underestimates the value of meditation, or has lost all taste for it, provides a sad confirmation of what we have been saying. Let your eyes dwell on the spectacle of men in whom the mind of Christ, that supremely precious gift, has grown weak; their thoughts are all on earthly things, they are engaged in vain pursuits, their words are so much unimportant chatter; in the performance of their sacred functions they are careless, cold, perhaps even unworthy. Formerly, these same men, with the oil of priestly ordination still fresh upon them, diligently prepared themselves for the recitation of the Psalms, lest they should be like men who tempt God; they sought a time and place free from disturbance; they endeavored to grasp the divine meaning; in union with the psalmist they poured forth their soul in songs of praise, sorrow and rejoicing. But now, what a change has taken place!

In like manner, little now remains of that lively devotion which they felt towards the divine mysteries. Formerly, how beloved were those tabernacles![47] It was their delight to be present at the table of the Lord, to invite more and more pious souls to that banquet! Before Mass, what purity, what earnestness in the prayers of a loving heart! How great reverence in the celebration of Mass, with complete observance of the august rites in all their beauty! What sincerity in thanksgiving! And the sweet perfume of Christ was diffused over their people! We beg of you, beloved sons: Call to mind . . . the former days;[48] for then your soul was burning with zeal, being nourished by holy meditation.

Some of those who find recollection of the heart[49] a burden, or entirely neglect it, do not seek to disguise the impoverishment of soul which results from their attitude, but they try to excuse themselves on the pretext that they are completely occupied by the activity of their ministry, to the manifold benefit of others.

They are gravely mistaken. For as they are unaccustomed to converse with God, their words completely lack the inspiration which comes from God when they speak to men about God or inculcate the counsels of the christian life; it is as if the message of the Gospel were practically dead in them. However distinguished for prudence and eloquence, their speech does not echo the voice of the good Shepherd which the sheep hear to their spiritual profit; it is mere sound which goes forth without fruit, and sometimes gives a pernicious example to the disgrace of religion and the scandal of the good.

It is the same in other spheres of their activity; there can be no solid achievement, nothing of lasting benefit, in the absence of the heavenly dew which is brought down in abundance by the prayer of the man who humbles himself.[50]

At this point we cannot refrain from referring with sorrow to those who, carried away by pernicious novelties, dare to maintain a contrary opinion, and to hold that time devoted to meditation and prayer is wasted. What calamitous blindness! Would that such people would take thought seriously with themselves and realize whither this neglect and contempt of prayer leads. From it have sprung pride and stubbornness; and these have produced those bitter fruits which in our paternal love we hesitate to mention and most earnestly desire to remove completely.[51]

May God answer this our prayer: may he look down with kindness on those who have strayed, and pour forth on them the "spirit of grace and of prayer" in such abundance that they may repent of their error and, of their own will and to the joy of all, return to the path which they wrongly abandoned, and henceforth follow it with greater care. God himself be witness, as he was to the Apostle, of how we long for them all with the love of Jesus Christ.[52]

Beloved sons, may this our exhortation, which is none other than the exhortation of Christ our Lord: Be watchful, be vigilant and pray,[53] be deeply engraven in their hearts and in yours. Let each one diligently apply himself above all to the practice of pious meditation; let him do so with sincere confidence, constantly repeating the words: Lord teach us to pray.[54] There is a special, very important reason which should urge us to meditation; it is that meditation is a rich source of the wisdom and virtue which are so useful in the supremely difficult task of caring for souls.

The pastoral address of St. Charles Borromeo is relevant here and is worth recalling: "Realize, my brethren, that nothing is so necessary to an ecclesiastic as mental prayer before, during and after all our actions. I will sing, said the prophet, and I will understand.[55] If administering the sacraments, my brother, meditate on what you are doing; if celebrating Mass, ponder on what you are offering; in reciting the Psalms, reflect on what you are saying and to whom you are speaking; if directing souls, reflect on the Blood with which they were washed." [56]

Therefore, it is with good reason that the Church commends us to repeat frequently the sentiments of David: Blessed is the man who meditates in the law of the Lord, whose desire is upon it night and day; everything that he does shall prosper.[57]

There is one final motive which can be regarded as comprising all the others. If the priest is called "another Christ" and is truly such by reason of his sharing in Christ's power, should he not also become and be recognized as another Christ through imitation of Christ's deeds? "Let it be our principal study to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ." [58]

3 SPIRITUAL READING

It is of great importance that the priest should combine his daily divine meditation with the constant reading of pious books, especially the inspired books. That was the command that Paul gave to Timothy: Attend unto reading.[59] The same lesson was taught by St. Jerome when instructing Nepotianus on the priestly life: "Never let the sacred book leave your hands"; and he gave the

following reason for his advice: "Learn that which you are to teach; holding to that faithful word which conforms to doctrine, that you may be able to exhort with sound doctrine, and refute the opponents." What great advantages are gained by priests who are faithful to this practice! With what unction they preach Christ! Far from flattering and soothing the hearts and minds of their audience, they stimulate them to better things, and arouse in them the desire of heavenly things.

The command of St. Jerome: "Let the sacred books be always in your hands,"[60] is important for another reason also, a reason which concerns your own personal welfare.

Everyone knows the great influence that is exerted by the voice of a friend who gives candid advice, assists by his counsel, corrects, encourages and leads one away from error. Blessed is the man who has found a true friend;[61] he that has found him has found a treasure.[62] We should, then, count pious books among our true friends. They solemnly remind us of our duties and of the prescriptions of legitimate discipline; they arouse the heavenly voices that were stifled in our souls; they rid our resolutions of listlessness; they disturb our deceitful complacency; they show the true nature of less worthy affections to which we have sought to close our eyes; they bring to light the many dangers which beset the path of the imprudent. They render all these services with such kindly discretion that they prove themselves to be not only our friends, but the very best of friends. They are always at hand, constantly beside us to assist us in the needs of our souls; their voice is never harsh, their advice is never self-seeking, their words are never timid or deceitful.

There are many striking examples of the salutary effects of the reading of pious books. Outstanding is the case of Augustine whose great services to the Church had their origin in such reading: "Take, read; take, read; I took (the epistles of Paul the Apostle), I opened, I read in silence; it was as though the darkness of all my doubting was driven away by the light of peace which had entered my soul."[63]

In our own day, alas! it is the contrary that happens all too frequently. Members of the clergy allow their minds to be overcome gradually by the darkness of doubt and turn aside to worldly pursuits; the chief reason for this is that they prefer to read a variety of other works and newspapers, which are full of cunningly propounded errors and corruption, rather than the divine books and other pious literature.

Be on your guard, beloved sons; do not trust in your experience and mature years, do not be deluded by the vain hope that you can thus better serve the general good. Do not transgress the limits which are determined by the laws of the Church, nor go beyond what is suggested by prudence and charity towards oneself. Anyone who admits this poison into his soul will rarely escape the disastrous consequences of the evil thus introduced.

4 EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

The benefits to be derived from spiritual reading and meditation will certainly be more abundant if the priest supplements them by an examination which will enable him to discern whether he is striving conscientiously to put into practice what he has learned in his reading and meditation.

Particularly relevant in this context is the excellent advice of Chrysostom which was intended especially for priests. Every night before going to sleep, "make your conscience appear in judgment; demand of it an account, and having thoroughly probed and dissected whatever evil purposes you formed during the day, repent for them."[64]

The excellence of this practice and its fruitfulness for christian virtue are clearly established by the teaching of the great masters of the spiritual life. We are pleased to quote that remarkable passage from the rule of St. Bernard: "As a searching investigator of the integrity of your own conduct, submit your life to a daily examination. Consider carefully what progress you have made or what

ground you have lost . . . Strive to know yourself . . . Place all your faults before your eyes. Come face to face with yourself, as though you were another person, and then weep for your faults."[65]

It would be shameful, indeed, were we to see verified in this matter the words of Christ: The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.[66] You know with what assiduity the children of this world manage their affairs, how often they compare income with expenses, how carefully and strictly they balance their accounts, how they grieve over their losses, and drive themselves on to make them good.[67] We, on the other hand, though perhaps our hearts are eager for gaining honors, for increasing our wealth, or for the mere winning of renown and glory by our learning, are listless and without inclination for the supremely important and difficult task of achieving our own sanctification. Rarely do we take time for recollection and submit our souls to scrutiny; our soul has become overgrown like the vineyard of the slothful man, of which it is written: I passed by the field of the slothful man and by the vineyard of the foolish man; and behold with nettles it was all filled, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down. [68]

The situation is aggravated by the fact that all round us we see the multiplication of evil example which is a menace to priestly virtue itself every day calls for even greater vigilance and fresh endeavor.

Experience shows that the man who frequently subjects his thoughts, words and actions to a strict examination, gains new strength of soul both to detest and fly from evil and to desire and strive for the good.

It is also shown by experience that one who refuses to appear before the tribunal where justice sits in judgment, and conscience appears at once as the accused and the accuser, usually suffers grave loss and disadvantage thereby. Vainly too will one seek in the conduct of such a person for that circumspection, so highly prized in the christian, that tries to avoid even venial faults, or that sense of reverence, so becoming in a priest, which shudders at even the slightest offense to God.

This carelessness and indifference to one's own welfare sometimes go so far as to lead to neglect even of the sacrament of Penance, which Christ, in his great mercy, has given us as a most timely aid to human weakness.

It cannot be denied, and it is bitterly to be deplored, that not infrequently one finds priests who use the thunders of their eloquence to frighten others from sin, but seem to have no such fear for themselves and become hardened in their faults; a priest who exhorts and arouses others to wash away without delay the stains from their souls by due religious acts, is himself so sluggish in doing this that he delays even for months; he who knows how to pour the health-giving oil and wine into the wounds of others is himself content to lie wounded by the wayside, and lacks the prudence to call for the saving hand of a brother which is almost within his grasp. In the past and even to-day, in different places, what great evils have resulted from this, bringing dishonor to God and the Church, injuring the christian flock and disgracing the priesthood!

For our own part, beloved sons, when we reflect upon these matters, as is our bounden duty, we are overcome with grief and our voice breaks into lamentation.

Woe to the priest who fails to respect his high dignity, and defiles by his infidelities the name of the holy God for whom he is bound to be holy. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. "Sublime is the dignity of the priest, but great is his fall, if he is guilty of sin; let us rejoice for the high honor, but let us fear for them lest they fall; great is the joy that they have scaled the heights, but it is insignificant compared with the sorrow of their fall from on high."[69]

Woe then to the priest who so far forgets himself that he abandons the practice of prayer, rejects the nourishment of spiritual reading and never turns his attention inwards upon himself to hear the accusing voice of conscience. Neither the festering wounds on his conscience, nor even the tearful pleas of his mother the Church, will move such an unfortunate priest until those fearsome threats come upon him: Blind the heart of this people, make dull their ears, and close their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them.[70]

May God in his bounteous mercy grant that these ominous words may never be true of any of you, beloved sons; he knows what is in our heart, he sees that it is free from rancor towards anyone, and that it is inflamed with pastoral zeal and paternal love for all: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Is it not you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ?[71]

IV. PRIESTLY VIRTUES

You all know very well, wherever you may be, the difficult period through which, in the mysterious design of God, the Church is now passing. Consider likewise and ponder on the sacred duty which is yours to stand by and to assist in her struggles the Church which has bestowed upon you an office of such exalted dignity.

Now more than ever the clergy need to be men of more than ordinary virtue, virtue that is a shining example, eager, active, ever ready to do great things for Christ and to suffer much. There is nothing that we more ardently ask from God and desire for each and everyone of you.

May chastity, the choicest ornament of our priesthood, flourish undimmed amongst you; through the splendor of this virtue, by which the priest is made like the angels, the priest wins greater veneration among the christian flock, and his ministry yields an even greater harvest of holiness.

May the reverence and obedience which you solemnly pledged to those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to rule the Church, increase and gain strength; and especially, may your minds and hearts be linked by ever closer ties of loyalty to this Apostolic See which justly claims your respectful homage.

May all of you excel in charity-a charity that never seeks what is its own; when you have mastered the human incentives of jealous rivalry and self-seeking ambition, let all together in fraternal emulation strive for the glory of God.

A great multitude of sick, blind, lame and paralytics,[72] in abject misery, awaits the benefits of your charity; the youth above all, those countless young people who are the dearest hope of society and religion, it is they, menaced as they are by error and corrupting influences, who especially stand in need of your charitable activity.

Strive eagerly not only by means of catechetical instruction-which once more with even greater earnestness we commend to you-but by unsparing use of all the resources of wisdom and skill at your command, to deserve well of all. Whether your immediate task be to assist, to protect, to heal, to make peace, let your one aim and most ardent desire be to win or to secure souls for Christ. How unwearied, how industrious, how fearless are Christ's enemies in their activities, to the immeasurable loss of souls!

The Catholic Church rejoices in and is proud of the charity beyond praise which inspires the clergy to proclaim the Gospel of christian peace and to bring the blessings of salvation and civilization even to barbarous races; through their unsparing labor, sometimes consecrated by their blood, the kingdom of Christ is expanding constantly and the christian faith gains added splendor from these new triumphs.

If, beloved sons, the unsparing charity of your efforts is met by jealousy, reproaches and calumnies as frequently happens, do not allow yourselves to be overcome with sadness: Do not tire in doing good.[73]

Let your mind dwell on those countless great figures who, following the example of the Apostles, even in the midst of cruel insults borne for the name of Christ, went rejoicing, blessing those who cursed them.[74]

For we are the children and the brethren of the saints, whose names shine in the book of life, and whose praises the Church proclaims: Let us not stain our glory.[75]

COUNSELS OF PRIESTLY PERFECTION.

When the spirit of the grace of the priesthood has been restored and strengthened in the ranks of the clergy, our other proposals for reform, of whatever kind they may be, will with God's help prove much more successful.

For this reason we have thought it well to supplement what we have already said by some points of practical advice which will give you timely aid to preserve and nourish the grace of your priesthood.

First, there is the pious retreat during which the soul devotes itself to spiritual exercises, as they are called. These exercises are known and approved by all, though not everyone puts them into practice; there should, if possible, be a yearly retreat, performed either alone or, preferably, in common with others, the second method being usually more productive of good results, without prejudice to episcopal regulations. We ourselves have already spoken in praise of the advantages to be derived from a retreat, on the occasion when we issued certain decrees on this subject bearing on the discipline of the clergy of Rome.[76]

It will be no less profitable for souls, if a similar retreat lasting a few hours is performed each month either privately or with others. We are happy to note that in many places a custom of this kind has already been introduced, with the encouragement of the bishops who sometimes preside over the group assembled for retreat.

Another suggestion which we warmly recommend is that priests, as befits brothers, should form a closer union among themselves, with the approval and under the direction of the bishop. It is strongly to be recommended that they should form an association in order to help one another in adversity, to defend the honor of their name and office against attack, and for other similar objects. But it is even more important that they should form an association with a view to the cultivation of sacred learning, particularly in order to apply themselves with greater solicitude to the object of their vocation and to promote the welfare of souls by concerting their ideas and their efforts. The annals of the Church show that at times when priests generally lived in a form of common life, this association produced many good results. Why might not one re-establish in our own day something of the kind, with due attention to differences of country and priestly duties? Might not one justifiably hope, and the Church would rejoice at it, that such an institution would yield the same good results as formerly?

There are, indeed, associations of this kind which enjoy episcopal approval; and the advantages they confer are all the greater if one becomes a member early in life, in the very first years of the priesthood. We ourselves have had practical experience of the worth of one such association and fostered it during our episcopate; even still we continue to show special consideration to it and others.[77]

Beloved sons, it is your duty to value highly and to apply these aids to priestly grace and such other means as the watchful prudence of your bishops may suggest from time to time; thus with each passing day you will walk more worthily of the vocation in which you are called,[78] honoring your ministry and accomplishing in yourselves the will of God, that is, your sanctification.

FINAL EXHORTATION

Your sanctification has, indeed, first place in our thoughts and in our cares; therefore, with our eyes raised to heaven, we frequently pray for the whole clergy, repeating the words of Christ, our Lord: Holy Father . . . sanctify them.[79]

It is a source of joy to us that we are joined in that prayer by very many from among the faithful of every condition who are gravely concerned for your welfare and that of the Church; it is no less a source of joy that there are many generous souls, not only within the cloister but in the midst of the busy world, who offer themselves continuously as victims to God for the same object.

May the Lord graciously deign to accept, as a sweet perfume, their pure and sublime prayers, and may he not refuse our own humble supplication; we implore him, in his merciful providence, to come to our aid, and may he pour forth upon all the clergy the riches of grace, charity and virtue which repose in the most pure Heart of his beloved Son.

Finally, beloved sons, we are happy to express our heartfelt thanks for the manifold expressions of good wishes, inspired by filial piety, which were offered by you on the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of our ordination. The good wishes which we convey to you in return, we entrust to the care of the great Virgin Mother, Queen of Apostles, in order that they may be fulfilled even more abundantly.[80]

It was she who by her example showed the Apostles, who were the first to share the blessing of the priesthood, how they should persevere with one mind in prayer until they were clothed with power from on high; by her prayers she secured that power for them in more abundant measure, she increased and strengthened it by her counsel, so that their labors were abundantly blessed.

Beloved sons, we pray that the peace of Christ may reign in your hearts with the joy of the Holy Spirit; as a pledge of this we bestow on all with the deepest affection the Apostolic benediction.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, 4 August 1908, at the beginning of the sixth year of our pontificate.

ENDNOTES 1. The Exhortation *Haerent Animo* (4 August 1908. ASS XLI, p. 555-557) takes its place between the Encyclical *Pascendi* (8 September 1907) and the *Motu Proprio Sacrorum Antistitum* (1 September 1910); cf. nn. 108, 192. 2 Letter to the episcopate of Brazil (18 December 1910. AAS III (1911), p. 312). 3 Hebr. 13:17. 4 Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus*: cf. supra n. 24. 5 The same thought had been expressed by St. Pius X in the Letter concerning clerical discipline addressed to Cardinal Respighi (5 May 1904) "The restoration of all things in Christ which, with God's help, we have made it our purpose to achieve in the government of the Church, demands-as we have more than once shown-proper formation of the clergy, testing of vocations, examination of the integrity of life of the candidates, and prudence lest there be excessive leniency in opening to them the doors of the sanctuary. To bring about the reign of Jesus Christ in the world, nothing is more essential than a saintly clergy who, by their example, their preaching and their learning will be the guides of the faithful; an old proverb says that the people will always be like their priests: *Sicut sacerdos, sic populus*. Indeed we read in the Council of Trent. Nothing is more effective in training to piety and the worship of God than the life and example of those who are consecrated to the divine ministry; cut off from the world and its affairs, clerics are on a pedestal where they can be seen, and

men look into their lives as into a mirror in which they may see what they are to imitate" (Sess. XXII, c. I, de Reform. ASS XXXVI, p. 655); cf. supra, n. 7. 6. I Tim. 6:11. 7 Ephes. 4: 23-24. 8 Dan. 3:39. 9 Col. 1:10. 10 Hebr. 5:1. 11 Tit. 1:16. 12 Acts 1:1. 13 Mt. 5:13. 14 I Cor. 4:1. 15 I Cor. 5:20. 16 Jn. 15:15-16. 17 Hebr. 7:26. 18 S. John Chrysostom, Hom. LXXXII in Matth., n. 5: cf. supra, n. 68. 19 Ps. 15:5. 20 Ep. LII, ad Nepotianum, n. 5. 21 Col. 1:28. 22 Cf. supra, n. 70. 23 Sess. XXII, de Reform., c. I. 23a Ps. 92:5. 24 Letter Testem Benevolentiae to the Archbishop of Baltimore (22 January 1899. ASS XXXI, p. 476) condemning "Americanism." 25 Rom. 8:29. 26 Hebr. 13:8. 27 Mt. 11:29. 28 Phil. 2:8. 29 Gal. 5:24. 30 Leo XIII, loc. cit. 31 Cf. Decree of Sacred Cong. Consistory (18 November 1910) forbidding priests to take over the temporal administration of profane societies or institutions: "In our own day, by God's grace many institutions have been founded in the catholic world with the object of assisting the faithful in their temporal needs, notably banks, credit unions, rural banks, savings banks. The clergy should entirely approve and show favor to these various undertakings. But it is not right that they should divert clerics from the duties of their state and office, involve them in material affairs and leave them exposed to the cares, anxieties and dangers which are inseparable from these occupations. For this reason our Holy Father, Pius X, while recommending the clergy not to spare their efforts and advice in the foundation, support and development of these institutions, forbids absolutely by the present decree that clerics, whether secular or regular, should assume positions which involve administrative charges and obligations with their consequent dangers: for example, the function of president, director, secretary, treasurer and similar posts" (AAS II (1910), p. 910). 32 Mt. 16:24. 33 Mt. 20:1. 34 Acts 10:38. 35 I Cor. 3:7. 36 I Cor. 1:27-28. 37 Cf. supra, n. 32. 38 II Cor. 6:5-6. 39 De precatone, orat. I. 40 Hom. IV. 41 Cf. Apostolic Constitution Divino Afflatu, 1 November 1911, on the new arrangement of the Psalter in the Roman breviary (AAS III (1911), pp. 633-638). The same pastoral and spiritual concern is evident in that document. 42 Lk. 18:1. 43 Col. 4:2. 44 I Thess. 5:17. 45 De Consid. L. I, ch. vii. 46 Cf. supra, n. 61. 47 Cf. Ps. 83:2. 48 Hebr. 10:32. 49 Jer. 12:11. 50 Ecclus. 35:21. 51 Cf. supra, n. 112. 52 Cf. Phil. 1 8. 53 Mk. 13:33. 54 Lk. 11:1. 55 Ps. 100:1-2. 56 St. Charles Borromeo, ex orationibus ad clerum. 57 Ps. 1:1 ff. 58 Imitation of Christ, 1:1. 59 I Tim. 4:13. 60 Ep. LVIII ad Paulinum, n. 6. 61 Ecclus. 25:12. 62 Ecclus. 6:14. 63 Confessions, L. VIII, C. 12. 64 Exposit. in Ps. 4, n. 8. 65 Meditationes piissimae, c. V, de Quotid. sui ipsius exam. 66 Lk. 16:8. 67 Cf. supra, n. 63. 68 Prov. 24:30-31. 69 St. Jerome, in Ezech., L. xiii, 44, v. 30. 70 Is. 6:10. 71 Thess. 2:19. 72 Jn. 5:3. 73 II Thess. 3:13. 74 Cf. I Cor. 4:12. The Pope had written in similar terms to the French episcopate immediately after the Law of Separation: "The clergy of France will understand that in this difficult situation they must make their own the sentiments of the Apostles who rejoiced that they were thought worthy to suffer insults for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). They will, therefore, courageously assert the rights and liberty of the Church, but without giving offense to anyone. Nay more, in their concern for the law of charity, to which they are particularly bound as ministers of Jesus Christ, they will meet injustice with justice, counter insults by gentleness, and answer ill-usage by kindness" (Encyclical Vehementer Nos. 11 February 1906. ASS XXXIX, p. 14). 75 I Macc. 9:10. 76 Letter Experiendo to the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, 27 December 1904 (cf. supra, n. 58). St. Pius X frequently gave the practice of retreats first place among the means of perseverance and sanctification which he recommended to the clergy (cf. Letter to the bishops of Brazil, 18 December 1910. AAS III (1911), pp. 311-312). 77 The reference is to the Apostolic Union. At the very beginning of his pontificate, in the Brief Cum Nobis (28 December 1903), St. Pius X had recommended it and enriched it with numerous spiritual favors: "We ourselves were at one time attached to this Institute: we have had practical experience of its utility and excellence and have made a point of continuing to share in its benefits, even after our elevation to the dignity of the episcopate. By offering to all associates a uniform rule of life, with monthly meetings and spiritual conferences, a regular account of one's personal life to be submitted to superiors and a number of other charitable and beneficial relations, the Apostolic Union secures and strengthens the unity of the clergy and links in spiritual brotherhood priests who are widely separated.... In these conditions, each priest applies himself to the welfare and perfection of all and, though the cares of his ministry do not allow him to enjoy the advantages of living in common, he does not feel deprived of the benefit of a spiritual family and he does not want either for advice or the assistance of his brethren" (ASS XXXVI, p. 596). 78 Eph. 4:1. 79 Jn. 17:11 and 17. 80 Cf. Apostolic Letter Plane Compertum est.

21 May 1912, erecting the Archconfraternity of Mary, Queen of the Clergy, in the church of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet, Paris (AAS IV (1912), p. 439).