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"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest"—BALMEZ

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EXHORTATION TO CATHOLIC CLERGY OF OUR MOST HOLY LORD, PIOUS X. BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE POPE ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS PRIESTHOOD POPE PIUS X.

Beloved Sons, Health and Apostolic Benediction:

The words pregnant with fear, which the apostle of the Gentiles addressed to the Hebrews, warning them concerning the obedience due their superiors when he gravely affirmed "for they watch as being to render an account of your souls," are deeply rooted in our soul. For, if this truth expressed by the Apostle applies to all those who hold the reins of government in Christ's Church, it regards us especially who, though unequal to the burden, have received from the hand of God the supreme authority. Wherefore, night and day with care and solicitude we have not ceased to consider and plan whatever might make for the welfare and increase of the flock of Christ; and this particularly has occupied our thoughts that those who have been elevated to the Sacred orders be such as the dignity of their office demands, for we hold it true that in this way, above all others, we may hope for a healthy and happy religious condition.

Therefore, as soon as we entered our pontificate, although the venerable Brothers of the Universal Episcopate were unanimous, as they regarded the clergy of the Catholic world, in singing its many praises, we deemed it most opportune to exhort them earnestly to expend on no enterprise more care and study than in forming Christ in those who were rightly destined to form Christ in others. We know well the wishes of the Sacred Bishops in this regard; we know with what solicitude and care they have given their efforts to train the clergy in virtue, and for this it pleases us to have given them not only praise, but to have expressed to them openly our thanks.

But while as a result of such solicitude on the part of the Bishops, we congratulate many of the clergy for having enkindled heavenly desires, whence they may revive and preserve the grace of God received from the imposition of hands in the sacred priesthood, we must yet complain that others scattered over the different parts of the world have not so conducted themselves, that the Christian people gazing at them as at a mirror might be able, as it is fitting, to see what they should imitate. To these, then, we wish to lay open our heart in this letter, the heart of a father, which beats with anxious love at the sight of his sick child. Therefore, with this intent we add our entreaties to the Bishops' exhortations, which though addressed particularly to those who in their torpor are straying from the right road, that we may lead them back to the better path, are intended also to encourage others.

We point out the way by which each one should carefully strive day after day to be in truth what the Apostle has neatly expressed, "a man of God," and thus fulfil the just expectation of the Church. We shall say nothing that is absolutely novel to you or unknown to anyone, but simply those truths which all should remember. God inspires within us the hope that our voice will bear no measure fruit. This, indeed, we earnestly desire: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth" and this will be a most excellent and acceptable gift from you on the fiftieth anniversary of our priesthood, and while we "in a contrite heart and humble spirit" consider before God the years spent in the priesthood, we shall appear to expiate in some way at least whatever frailty is to be condoned, by admonishing and exhorting you "to walk worthy of God in all things pleasing." We shall regard, nevertheless, in our exhortation not only your utility, but the common advantage of the Catholic people, since one cannot be divorced from the other. For the priest is not a person who can be good or bad in himself alone; his mode of living and his conduct have a consequent effect on the people. Where the priest is really good, what a great blessing he becomes!

THE SANCTITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

Wherefore, beloved sons, we begin our exhortation that we may incite you to that sanctity of life, which the dignity of your office demands. For, whoever becomes a priest, is a priest, not for himself alone, but for others; "for every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God." This Christ indicated, who to show what should be the priest's conduct, wished to compare him to salt and to light. The priest, then, is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Surely all know that he becomes this by teaching the truths of Christ, but who does not likewise know, that his instruction is almost for nothing, unless he proves by his words what he preaches. His auditors insolently, indeed, yet deservedly reply: "They

finally, she adds: "If up to the present you have been tardy in regard to the Church, now you must be constant; if up to the present you have been careless, now you must be vigilant; if up to the present unchaste, now you must be pure. Behold! whose ministry is delivered to you." Then for those who are to be promoted to the diaconate she thus implores God through the mouth of the Bishop: "May the form of every virtue abound in them, modest authority, constant chastity, purity of conscience, and the spiritual observance of discipline, may their precepts shine forth in their actions, so that the people by the example of their chastity may in holy imitation follow them." But still more impressive is the warning that she gives to those approaching the sacred priesthood: "With great fear must ascend to this high dignity, and it must be an object of care that heavenly wisdom, sound morals and continual observance of what is just commend those chosen for it. Let the odor of your life be the joy of Christ's Church, that by preaching and example you may bring the House of God, that is, His people." And then what she adds most seriously urges above all other things. "Imitate what you do," which agrees in full with the precept of Paul, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

CHURCH'S IDEAL OF PRIESTHOOD.

Since this is the mind of the Church concerning the sacerdotal life, no one can wonder if the Holy Fathers and Doctors are so unanimous on this point, that one might think them too severe; yet if we consider them prudently, we shall find that they have taught nothing save that which is right and just. In a word, this is their teaching: that there should be as much difference between the priest and the good layman as there is between heaven and earth, and therefore the priest's life should be free not only of the graver defects, but even of the least. The Tridentine Synod was of the same mind when it "warned clerics to avoid 'even light faults, which in them are very serious,' not in themselves, but with regard to the one that sins, to whom with better right than to material edifices the words of Scripture apply: 'Holiness becometh thy house.'"

We must see in what sanctity of this kind, which the priest cannot lack, consists; for he who does not know this or accepts it perversely is surely exposed to great danger. There are those, indeed, who think, may even profess, that the priest's glory should be founded entirely on the fact that he gives himself wholly to others; therefore, neglecting the cultivation of those virtues by which man perfects himself (and, therefore, these they call passive), they contend that all effort and study should be directed to the cultivation and exercise of active virtues. This doctrine has a strange mixture of fallacy and ruin. On this subject our Predecessor of happy memory has wisely said: "He alone wishes to fit the Christian virtue to changing times, who forgets the words of the Apostle, 'for whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son.'"

The Master and exemplar of all sanctity is Christ, and all who desire to take their place among the seats of the blessed must adapt themselves to the rule He has given. Christ, however, does not change as the ages roll on, but is the same yesterday and to-day and the same forever. To men, therefore, of every age those words of Christ apply, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart," and at every time Christ shows Himself "becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." In every age the saying of the Apostle holds true: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences."

And if these documents regard each of the faithful, more properly do they apply to the priests; and let them before all others regard as addressed to themselves those words which our Predecessor added in his apostolic zeal: "Would that more of the present age would cultivate those virtues after the example of the holy men of past centuries! Who by their humility, obedience, abstinence were a power both in word and deed, and of the greatest possible assistance, not only in religious matters, but in public and civic life, also. And here it would not be inopportune to note that this prudent Pontiff has made special mention of abstinence, which in the words of the gospel we call self-abnegation, and deservedly; for under this head, beloved sons, the constancy and virtue and fruit of every priestly duty is included, and when this is neglected, there springs forth whatever may offend the eyes and hearts of the faithful in the life of the priest. For, if one acts for the sake of filthy lucre, or involves himself in worldly cares, or seeks the first places and despises others, or yields to flesh and blood, or seeks to please men, or trusts in the fickle words of human wisdom, all these are the result of neglecting the mandate of Christ and refusing the condition laid down by Him: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.'"

THE PRIEST NOT FOR HIMSELF ALONE, BUT FOR OTHERS.

While we inculcate these truths, we warn the priest at the same time that he must not be wholly for himself alone; he is the laborer whom Christ "went out to hire into His vineyard." Therefore he must uproot the seeds of error, and plant those of truth; he must care and watch lest the enemy sow cockle over them. Besides, he must be on his guard, lest through some imprudent desire for high perfection he neglect any of those duties conducive to the welfare of others. These are

to preach the Word of God, bear confessions, visit the sick, especially the dying, instruct those ignorant of their faith, comfort the sorrowful, lead back the wanderers, and in every way imitate Christ. And in performing these duties let the famous admonition of Paul be always before his mind: "neither be that planteth is anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." It may be that going and weeping they cast their seed; it may be that with anxious care they nourished it; but to make it sprout and bring forth the cherished fruit, this is the work of God alone and His powerful assistance.

This, also, is to be well considered, that men are nothing more than instruments which God uses for the saving of souls and that these instruments must be fit, therefore, to be handled by God. By what means, indeed, are they made fit? Do we think that God is moved to join our resources to the greatness of His glory by any excellence on our part, either inborn or obtained by study? By no means, for it is written: "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to naught things that are."

DANGERS OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

So this greatest of the great advantages which meditation is destined to bring forth, teaches and warns us not only how salutary, but also how necessary it is in every way. For, although the different duties of the priesthood are sacred and wont to inspire reverence, nevertheless, through frequent contact, those performing them do not treat them with that respect which is due them. Hence, as ardor diminishes, the descent to neglect and even to loathing of the most sacred objects is easy. Let me add that it is necessary for the priest to live day by day in the midst of a corrupt nation, as it were; and that often in every performance of his pastoral charity he must be constantly alert against the plots and snares of hell that lie in wait for him. What is more easy than for even religious hearts to become soiled by the filth of the world? Therefore, the fact is made apparent how great is the necessity of turning daily to the contemplation of things eternal, in order that the mind and will may presently take on new strength to persevere against allurements. Furthermore, it befits every priest to acquire a disposition to desire and strive after heavenly things. He should know, preach and recommend heavenly things; and he should guide his whole life in a superhuman course so that whatever he does for his sacred office, he does according to God, at the inspiration and guidance of faith. But it is the habit of daily meditation that effects and preserves this habit of mind and this quasi-natural union with God; a truth that is so evident to anyone gifted with prudence, that it is necessary to pursue it no longer.

LOVE OF PRAYER.

But since, as everyone knows, sanctity of life is the fruit of our will, provided that it is strengthened by the help of God's grace, God Himself has provided for us abundantly, lest we should lack at any time the help of His grace if we desire it, and this we obtain especially through prayer. Indeed, there is a necessary union between prayer and holiness, so that one cannot be had without the other. Wherefore, in perfect consonance with this truth are the words of Chrysostom, "I think it clear to all that it is simply impossible to live virtuously without the aid of prayer." Augustine keenly concludes: "He truly knows how to live rightly who rightly knows how to pray." These words Christ Himself both by frequent exhortation and example confirmed. It was to pray that He withdrew to the desert; that He went into the mountains alone; that He passed whole nights in meditation; that He made frequent visits to the temple; nay, even to the astonishment of the crowd, He prayed aloud with eyes raised to heaven, and finally nailed to the Cross He supplicated in the agony of death His Father with cries and with tears. Therefore, let us hold this as absolutely certain, that the priest, to maintain worthily his office and his calling, must be devoted in a singular manner to the love of prayer. More frequently must we remember that he prays from habit rather than from devotion, who recites the Psalms at stated periods in a negligent manner, or says a few short prayers and gives no part of his day to conversing with God, speaking to Him through gratitude and devotion. For the priest more than others should obey exactly the precept of Christ; "we ought always to pray," to which St. Paul adds: "Be instant in prayer, watching in it in thanksgiving; pray without ceasing." How many opportunities to turn to God offer themselves during the day to the soul that desires its own sanctity as well as the salvation of others! Anguish of spirit, the onslaught and persistence of temptations, the lack of virtues, the poverty and sterility of our works, our frequent offences and negligences, the fear of God's Judgment; all these incite us to pray, and with the aid that we seek make for ourselves in heaven a treasury of our good deeds and merits. Nor must we weep for ourselves alone in this confux of crimes, which has spread far and wide, we must implore and pray for divine clemency; we must solicit Christ, who is most benignly lavish with all grace in His wonderful sacrament, spare, O Lord, spare Thy people! The principal point is to devote a certain space of time daily to the meditation of things eternal. There is no priest who can omit this without a grave mark of neglect and without harm to his soul. The most holy Abbot Bernard, when writing to Eugene III., his foster son, but then the Roman Pontiff, admonished him freely and strongly never to fail in

this daily meditation of divine things, admitting none of the many and very great cares which the supreme Apostle had, as an excuse. And he asserted that he was demanding this with justice, thus enumerating with the greatest foresight the advantage of this practice. "Meditation purifies the very spring, that is, the mind, from which it arises. Then it rules our affections, guides our actions, corrects our excesses, arranges our habits, regulates and rectifies our life; finally it gives a knowledge of human and divine truths. This is the knowledge which separates those things that are confused, puts together those that are loosely connected, gathers those that are scattered, searches those that are hidden, traces those that are true, examines those that are probable, explores those that are feigned and counterfeit. This is the knowledge which sets in order those things which are to be done, which considers those already performed, so that nothing remains in the mind uncorrected or needing correction. This is the knowledge which feeds adversity in prosperity, and in adversity is, as it were, without feeling. One of which is fortitude, the other prudence."

There is one quality which indisputably links man with God and makes him the pleasing and not unworthy "dispenser" of His mercy, namely, sanctity of life and morals. If this, which is but the supereminence of knowledge of Jesus Christ, is lacking in a priest, all things are lacking. For, when not united with sanctity, that supply of carefully sought out learning (which we ourselves are striving to promote in the clergy), and that dexterity and skill in exercising it, even if they may be able to bestow some emolument either upon the Church or upon ourselves, are often the lamentable cause of harm to their possessors. But how many wonderfully salutary works can be, though the humblest, attempt and accomplish for the "people of God," if he is graced and adorned by sanctity, the testimonies of every age bear witness; among them John Bapt. Vianney, of recent memory, the exemplary pastor of souls, to whom we are happy to have given the honors of the Heavenly Blessed. Sanctity alone makes us what our vocation demands, namely, men crucified to the world and to whom the world is crucified; men walking the narrowness of life, who, as Paul tells us, "saw themselves to be the ministers of God 'in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity, unfeigned, in the word of Truth," who alone seek heavenly things and strive in every way to lead others to them.

The confirmation of these words said, indeed, we may find in the lives of those priests who give little time to the meditation of divine truths or openly dislike it. For, behold! men, in whom the spirit of Christ, that intangible good, has grown languid; busy with the things of this world entirely, seeking varieties, desiring novelties, and performing sacred duties carelessly, coldly, perhaps unworthily. Formerly these very men, imbued with the still fresh chrism of their priestly unction, prepared diligently their souls for prayer, lest they should be like those who tempt God; they sought opportune moments and convenient places away from distraction; they sought to know the divine sense they praised, and sighed, rejoiced and poured forth their spirit with their psalms. But now, how changed! In like manner, hardly a trace of that quick devotion remains in them which they once felt toward the divine mysteries. How beautiful were those tabernacles formerly! The soul loved to be present at the table of the Lord and to call other devoted hearts there also. What cleanliness before the altar, and what prayers of a thirsting soul! Their reverence in the Mass itself, the smallest ceremonies properly observed. What blessings poured forth from the heart and the good odor of Christ diffused itself happily among the people—"Call to mind," we beseech you, beloved sons, "call to mind the former days"; then the soul was warm because it was nourished with holy meditation.

WARNING AGAINST DECEPTION.

But among those who refuse or neglect "to consider in the heart," there are some who do not conceal the consequent sterility of their souls, and excuse themselves, offering as a reason that they are given entirely to the cares of the ministry to the manifold advantage of others. They are deceived miserably. For, unaccustomed to speak with God, they lack the divine fire when they speak to men about Him or impart the principles of Christian living, so that the gospel message seems to be lifeless in them. Their voice, whatever praise may be given to it for its facility and eloquence, does not render the voice of the Good Shepherd, which the sheep hear to their safety; it roars and sounds empty, and sometimes it is pregnant with dangerous examples that bring shame to religion and offence to the faithful; nor is it different in the other duties of the active life, for there can be no fruits of lasting good, or even of short duration, when the dew of heaven is lacking, which the prayer of Him that humbly Himself brings down in abundance. We cannot at this place refrain from grieving for those who, carried away by postential novelties, do not fear to think otherwise and regard the work given to meditation and prayer lost.

Alas, unhappy blindness! Would that they themselves should consider it justly and that some time they

should know to what point the neglect and contempt of prayer leads. From these were born pride and arrogance; whence arose those so bitter fruits which our paternal mind both shrinks from mentioning and desires most earnestly to forget. May God be favorable to our desires; may He look down benignly upon the wayward, and pour out upon them the spirit of grace and prayer in so great an abundance that repenting their error they may willingly seek out, to the joy of all, the ways which they in their evil have deserted, and continue with more caution. Let God Himself be our witness, as He was once to the Apostle, how we long after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. Therefore, O beloved sons, may our exhortation, "Take ye heed, watch and pray," which is that of Christ our Lord, sink deeply into their hearts and yours. Especially let the industry of each and everyone be exerted in the zeal for pious meditation; let also your confidence of soul be exercised, asking again and again: "Lord, teach us to pray."

THE POWER OF MEDITATION.

Nor should we consider any peculiar case unworthy of meditation; rather let the strength of our intellect and virtue be directed thither as earnestly as is possible, for this is most useful for the proper care of our souls, which is a very difficult task for us all. While on this matter the pastoral address of St. Charles is worthy of mention: "Understand, brethren, that nothing is so necessary to ecclesiastical dignities as mental prayer, preceding, accompanying and following all our actions." "I will sing," says the prophet, "and I will understand." If you administer the Sacraments, brother, meditate on what you are doing; if you celebrate Mass, meditate on what you are offering; if you pray, meditate on what you say and to whom you are speaking; if you are directing souls, think in what blood they have been washed. Wherefore, with justice the Church commands us to repeat frequently the words of David, "Blessed is the man, who meditates in the law of the Lord; his will remains day and night, and all things whatsoever he shall do, shall prosper." For all that we have said, let there be in itself great incentive that sums up in itself all others. For, if a priest is called another Christ, and is the recipient of His power, should he not both become and be considered so, even by the imitation of His deeds? "Let it then be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ." It is of great import that a priest assiduously combine together with his daily consideration of divine things the reading of pious books, and especially those which are divinely inspired. So Paul commands Timothy, "attend unto reading." Likewise Jerome, when instructing Nepotian about the priestly life, inculcates the following: "Never let sacred reading fall from your hands," and he adds the reason: "Learn what you teach, obtain that faithful truth, which is according to doctrine, that you may be able to exhort in same doctrine and convince those that contradict you." And how much indeed, those priests advance who, though indeed, themselves to this habit; how wisely they preach Christ, and how they impel the minds and hearts of their listeners to better things and direct them to heavenly desires, rather than soothing and appeasing them. But also for another reason, and that profitable to your work, beloved sons the precept of St. Jerome applies: "Let your hands be always occupied with sacred reading"; for who does not know that the greatest influence that one friend exerts over another is the influence of him who gives candid advice, who aids by his counsel, who corrects, encourages, and recalls from error? "Blessed is the man that findeth a true friend and he that hath found him hath found a treasure." Now we ought to make pious books our faithful friends.

SPIRITUAL READING.

They tell us of our duties and they give rules of legitimate discipline; they arouse the heavenly voices that are silent in our souls; they chastise the idleness of our designs; they disturb our deceitful tranquility; they throw into a clear light our less worthy affections that are sometimes disguised; they show the dangers that lay open to the imprudent. All these favors they show us with such silent benevolence that we may regard them not only as friends, but as the best of friends. For, indeed, we have them whenever we wish, clinging as it were to our side, ready at any time to assist us in our immediate necessities—whose voice is never harsh, whose advice never partial, and whose words are never timid or deceitful. Many illustrious examples prove the wholesome efficiency of pious books; but the example of Augustine stands forth among others, whose marvellous deeds for the Church received their guidance hence, "Take and read, take and read." "I snatched (the Epistles of Paul the Apostle) opened, read in silence." As if the light of faith was infused into my heart, the shadows of every doubt rolled away." But, alas! it often happens in our day, that members of the clergy are gradually affected by the shadows of doubts and the strangeness of the age, precisely because they prefer other books and every kind and species of newspapers to divine and pious writings and those which they prefer are filled with tempting errors and deceptions. Beware, beloved sons, trust not your mature and advanced age, and do not allow yourself to be deluded by the deceitful hope that you can better provide for the common good. Let those exact limits be observed which the laws of the Church determine, and which prudence and love of self suggest; for if poison of this kind is

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