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PASTORAL LETTER

OF HIS LORDSHIP

RT. REV. JOHN WALSH, D.D.,

BISHOP OF LONDON,

Promulgating the Decrees of the First Provincial Council of Toronto.

JOHN WALSH, by the Grace of God and the appointment of the Holy See, Bishop of London.

To the Clergy, Religious Communities and the Laity of the Diocese, health and benediction in the Lord.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

We have the pleasure to inform you that the decrees of the first Provincial Council of Toronto have been returned from Rome, revised and corrected by the supreme authority of the Holy See. We have already solemnly promulgated them to our clergy assembled in spiritual retreat, and now again, we by these presents publish them for our Diocese, and ordain that they shall be reverentially and faithfully observed by all whom they concern within our Episcopal jurisdiction.

The First Provincial Council of Toronto forms an epoch in the ecclesiastical history of this Province; it is as it were the term of an old state of things that has passed away, and the starting point, let us hope, of a bright and prosperous future for the Church in Ontario.

Until 1870 the Ecclesiastical Province of Quebec comprised Eastern and Western Canada, but in that year, the Holy See, in its wisdom, and in its solicitude for the spiritual welfare of its children, erected the Ecclesiastical Province of Toronto, which comprises the civil limits of Ontario, with the exception of that part of it which lies within the bounds of the Diocese of Ottawa, and the Vicariate Apostolic of Pontiac.

If we indulge in a retrospect on this occasion, it is to bless and thank God for the marvelous increase he has mercifully vouchsafed to His Church in this Province. But a few years ago, and there were only a few scattered priests laboring in the Lord's vineyard in Ontario; Catholic families, poor and unfriended, were toiling in the wilderness, striving to cut out a homestead from the reluctant forest; children grew up without religious instruction, and many of them were, in consequence, lost to the church. The little ones of Christ were famishing for the bread of life, and there were few or no consecrated hands to break it unto them. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the great central act of Christian worship, for which the most glorious structure ever designed by human genius and built by human hands is too unworthy, could be offered up but at distant intervals, and then only in the smoky cabin, or in the humble log chapel. Marriages were often unblest by the ministrations of the Church, and the Sundays were un sanctified. The sick and sorrow-stricken were in many instances deprived of the consolations of religion; and, too frequently, alas, souls went to their dread account, unshriven, and unanointed, in the loneliness of the forest.

But the picture which now presents itself is, thank God, very different. Ontario is at present an Ecclesiastical Province, having an Archbishop and four suffragan Bishops, nearly three hundred priests, and a Catholic population of about 330,000. Happier than the faithful of other countries, we possess a system of Catholic primary education established by law; we have a sufficient number of colleges and conventual academies for higher education, and also charitable institutions for the protection of orphans, and for the healing and comfort of the sick and suffering. Churches have arisen in our cities, towns and villages, and crosses gleam from their steeples through the length and breadth of the land.

To the holy bishops and zealous and devoted priests who have passed to their reward, this happy state of things is, under God, mainly due. They bore the burden of the day and the heats; they sowed in tears that we might reap in joy: "Sowing they went and wept, casting their seeds, but we, coming with joyfulness, carry the sheaves."—Psalm cxvii. 66. It is for us clergy to take up the great work which they began. On us the responsibility of the present, and, in a sense, of the future depends. Canada is a free and happy country; no penal law has ever soiled the pages of her statute book; no state trammels hamper the action or clog the activity of the Holy Church. Here the bride of Christ may walk forth in all her loveliness like unto the spouse of the Canticles coming up from the desert, fragrant with perfumes of the sweet odours; here there is opened out to the energies and divine zeal of the Church, a field of labor, fair and free as that on which the eyes of the Patriarch rested when about to separate from Lot. Great are our opportunities; great also are our responsibilities.

Let us clergy quit ourselves as true ministers of God, animated with the spirit of our

holy vocation, and zealous for the divine glory and for the salvation of souls; imitating St. Paul, who counted all things loss that he might gain Christ, and who became all things to all men, that he might win souls to God and heaven. We have a most momentous commission to fulfil, and on the manner in which we shall discharge its duties will depend the unutterable happiness, or the endless misery of thousands yet unborn. "The charity of Christ presseth us," and if we keep before our eyes the divine pattern of self-sacrifice and of love for souls once shown us on the mountains, we shall not fail to bring the blessings of heaven upon our labours, and to make our ministry fruitful in the salvation and sanctification of our people. The greatest and most unwearied labours in the work of the holy ministry unless blessed and fertilized by the grace of God will be barren of results, and like the fruitless fig tree, will but cumber the ground. "Paul may plant and Apollon water, but it is God who gives the increase, therefore neither he who planteth is anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." (1st Cor. iii. 6, 7). The greatest talents, the most brilliant gifts of genius, the most ceaseless activity if not matured and made fruitful by the two-fold love of God and of our neighbor, may, it is true, please and dazzle and win admiration, but they avail nothing in the sight of God, and are blighted by the curse of barrenness as regards the salvation of souls. Hence, in order to the efficient discharge of the sublime duties of the sacerdotal office, in order to bring down upon our work the fertilizing dews of Divine grace we must lean upon God, without whom we can do nothing, either for our own personal sanctification or for the salvation of our neighbor. These are old truths but they cannot be too often repeated and dwelt upon. Like the Apostles on the Sea of Galilee, who in the absence of their Lord fished all night long and caught nothing (it was only when he was present that the miraculous draught of fishes took place), so we "fishers of men," unless united with God and animated by His holy spirit shall labour and toil in the Master's vineyard without any results fruitful in glory to God and in good to man. The love of God burning in the hearts of his ministers, and the "form of all justice shining forth" in their lives like the light of a transfiguration and clothing them in its heavenly beauty—these are the loadstones that draw souls from the rubbish of worldly and sinful pleasures and attachments, and attract them to holiness, and to God who is their centre, and the home and resting place of human hearts.

We say, therefore, to you, dear Reverend Clergy, in the words of our beautiful Ordination Service, "The Lord chose seventy-two, and sent them two and two to preach that in word and act He might teach the ministers of His Church that they ought to be perfect founded, that is in the power of the two-fold love of God and of our neighbor. Therefore in your conduct hold fast to the integrity of a chaste and holy life. Understand what it is that you do. Imitate that which in your hand you hold, so that celebrating the mystery of the Lord's death you may come even to the mortifying of your own members from all vices and concupiscence. Let your teaching be the healing medicine of God's people; let the odor of your life delight the Church of Christ that by word and by example you may build up the house which is the family of God." It is in this spirit we should live and labour and endeavor to build up the Church of God in this new land; and as an auspicious and powerful aid towards the fulfillment of our task, we hail the promulgation of the decrees of the First Provincial Council of Toronto. What then is a Provincial Council? In the language of canonists, a Provincial Council is the congregation in Synod of the Bishops of some one Province of the Church, called together by him who has the legitimate authority, that is, by the Archbishop or Metropolitan of that Province, to which all those are likewise called, who by right or custom possess the claim to be called.

To the Archbishop belongs the right of convoking a Provincial Synod, of appointing a place in which it is to be held, and of presiding over its deliberations. Whilst the other members of the Synod enjoy the deliberate voice, the Bishops alone possess the decisive voice. The object and extent of synodal action are described by the Council of Trent as extending to "the regulation of morals and correction of abuses, the settling of controversies and such other purposes as are allowed by the Sacred Canons." When the Bishops meet to deliberate in synod, they begin their proceedings by invoking the light and aid of the Holy Ghost, and to this end recite the following beautiful prayer:

"We are here, O Lord, Holy Spirit; we

are here in Thy presence detained, it is true, in the exceedingness of our sins, yet specially gathered together in Thy name. Do Thou come unto us; do Thou be present with us; do Thou vouchsafe to descend into our hearts. Teach us what we must do; show us the way in which we should walk; work Thou the work we are to bring about. Do Thou suggest; do Thou accomplish our judgments, who alone with the Father and the Son, dost possess the glorious name; join us efficaciously to Thy gift of grace, alone, that we may be one in Thee, and may in nothing swerve from the truth; that being gathered together in Thy name, we may in all things hold fast to justice, tempered with piety, so that here our judgment may in nothing contend with Thee, and hereafter we may obtain the eternal reward for what we have well done."

Two things our Blessed Lord has promised to ecclesiastical synods, provided they be called together in His name, namely: A judicial power of binding and loosing, and a divine assistance in their deliberations. Our Blessed Lord said to His apostles, and through them to their successors, the Bishops of the Catholic Church: "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.—Matt. xviii. 18. Our Divine Redeemer also makes the following promise: "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven: for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."—Matt. xvi. 19, 20. These words have according to Catholic tradition a special application to the Synods of the Church. Yet what mean the words "gathered together in My name"? Catholic Bishops are gathered together in the name of Christ, when they assemble in Synod according to the order prescribed by Christ himself, namely: obedience to, and in communion with Christ's Supreme Vicar upon earth. It is to St. Peter and his successors that our Lord committed the charge of His entire flock; i.e., Bishops, priests and laity, when he said, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep."—John xxi. chap. The Pope is the rock-foundation on which the Church is built, proof against the lightning and the tempest. It is the right and prerogative of the Pope to confirm his brethren in the faith, and to sanction and give force to their legislative acts. Hence the Vatican Council decrees that the Roman Pontiff belongs the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the entire Church, not merely in things that appertain to faith and morals, but also in what concerns the discipline and government of the Church spread throughout the world.

It is for this reason, and in accordance with canonical usage, the decrees of our First Provincial Synod have been sent to the Holy See for examination and confirmation. They have been returned stamped with the sanction of this supreme authority, and henceforward they have a binding power and force over the whole ecclesiastical Province of Ontario.

UTILITY OF PROVINCIAL SYNODS.

The fact that the Church enjoins the holding, at stated intervals, of Provincial Synods is a sufficient evidence of their great utility. In such solemn assemblies, holy Bishops and zealous and experienced priests, who are associated with them "as the chords of a lyre," meet together to examine into the state of religion in their respective dioceses, and in the whole Ecclesiastical Province; they consult together regarding the wants of the Church; the state of ecclesiastical discipline; the abuses that may exist; the relaxation in morals that may have taken place amongst the flocks committed to their pastoral care. They deliberate as to the best means of re-establishing or preserving ecclesiastical discipline; of removing abuses; of stimulating the piety and zeal of the clergy; of promoting the growth and practice of Christian virtues amongst the laity, and they draw up such laws and regulations as in their judgment are best suited to forward and advance the aforesaid objects. Surely there can be no doubt as to the immense utility and importance of such Synods and the vast amount of good they are calculated to effect. "The whole order of the Synod," says St. Charles Borromeo, "exhibits the form of apostolic mission. For whilst with mutual charity we confer on our affairs and on what belongs to the Churches; whilst we discuss the most chastened cultivation of the sacred offices; whilst we investigate the discipline of both clergy and people; whilst we inspect the execution of our own decrees and visitations; whilst we set before our eyes whatever things are found to be defective in their institutions; whilst we are consulting how best we may restore them; whilst under the authority of the Holy Spirit we are intent on framing other

constitutions, whereby we may aptly repair whatever demands our care—the whole object and end at which we aim is none other than that by these helps our minds may be illuminated, our charity enkindled, our hearts inflamed with love of souls, and that the episcopal force and ardour in our own souls may be more and more burning—that by the authority of our decrees a certain new spirit may be stirred within us to reduce the turbulent to order; to drive away the pestilence of vices; to heal each spiritual sickness, and to bring to the people beneath our care whatever remedies they need. Oh! salutary labours of episcopal councils." Such is the scope and objects of Provincial Synods, and such the rich graces of fervour, piety and holiness of life, which they are intended and calculated to produce and mature amongst clergy and laity.

We avail ourselves of this occasion, dear brethren, to call your special attention to certain duties and obligations which the laws of God and of His Church enjoin, and to the faithful discharge of which we exhort you with all possible earnestness.

THE DUTY OF SUPPORTING THE CLERGY.

The faithful are bound to supply the temporal necessities of their pastors, by the law of nature as well as by the positive law of God, as contained both in the Old and New Testaments. This obligation will be evident when we consider the office and duties of a pastor of souls. He is chosen by a special vocation from God for the sublime state of the holy priesthood, and "is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins."—(Hebrews, v. 1.) The priest is the representative of Jesus Christ on earth. "He that heareth you heareth me."—Luke x. c. 16 v. He is the official public teacher of Christ's saving truths: "Go teach all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."—Matthew xxviii. c. 16, 20 v. He is the ambassador of Christ, and the dispenser of His mysteries; he is the guardian of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. In his anointed hands, as he stands at the altar and repeats the words of consecration, the Son of God becomes, as it were, incarnate, and offers Himself as a victim of propitiation to His eternal Father for the sins of men, and applies to immortal souls the saving merits of the bloody sacrifice of Calvary. The ministry of the Catholic priest is linked with the dearest associations of Catholic life. The priest baptizes the new born infant, and thus makes it a child of God, and an heir of heaven; he unfolds to the young mind the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, and teaches it those great truths that flame out like beacons of salvation on the darksome journey of life; he causes the child to be enrolled, through confirmation, amongst the soldiers of Jesus Christ, and thus equips him for warfare against the enemies of salvation. When the sinner comes heavy-laden with the burden of guilt and of sorrow, which is ever its companion, the priest of God receives him like the Father of the Prodigal, forgives his sins through the Sacrament of Penance, and through this wondrous mystery of reconciliation, restores him to the friendship of his heavenly Father, and to the peace and protection and privileges of his Father's house.

But the priest not only takes up this poor wounded traveller of life, whom he finds robbed and wounded by the wayside of sin and error; he cares tenderly for him; he pours the oil and wine of Christ's healing merits into his wounded soul; he feeds him with the bread of life—the body and blood of Christ—and thus enables him to reach the land of promise—the kingdom of God's eternal happiness. The priest comforts and relieves the poor; he consoles the afflicted and sorrow-stricken; he brings the peace of Christ into families torn by dissensions; he reconciles neighbors that were estranged; he admonishes and reproves the erring; he encourages the wavering; and by word and example he points out to all his flock the road that leads to heaven and to happiness. And when sickness enters the homestead, when medical aid is impotent to stay the ravages of disease, and to assuage the pains of illness, the priest, the physician of the soul, comes and ministers to the mind diseased, heals the infirmities of the soul, consoles and fortifies the dying Christian with the Sacraments of Christ, reconciles him to death as coming from the will of God, and thus by his Christian ministrations makes death a sacred and holy thing, and the gate that opens into a happy eternity. When the poor body, cold and lifeless, is borne to the church, amid the tears of friends and the sympathetic regrets of neighbors, the priest is there to offer up the holy sacrifice for the soul that is gone, to beseech for it eternal rest and light perpetual, and by holy prayers and solemn benedictions to commit the mortal remains to the guardianship of the consecrated grave. Thus, from the cradle to the grave, in our joys and sorrows, in the epochs that mark the path-

way of our existence, with the dearest associations and the deepest interests of our lives, the ministry of the Catholic priest is most intimately connected and intertwined. And in order that he may be free to devote his time and labour, and expend his life in the performance of these sublime duties and divine ministrations, he is forbidden to marry, and binds himself by vow not to enter into the married state, lest he should be trammelled by the cares and anxieties attending it, and be prevented from giving his whole time and care to the service of God and his people. He is furthermore forbidden to follow any worldly business, trade, or profession; for "no man, says St. Paul, being a soldier of God, entangleth himself with secular business that he may please Him to whom he hath engaged himself, (2 Tim. ii. 4.)

Now the priest is not an angel, but a man having human wants and necessities, and must be supported. His whole time is occupied with his duties to God and his flock. It follows, therefore, from the very law of nature, that he is entitled to an honourable support from his flock, and that those who profit spiritually by his labours and ministrations are bound in justice to supply his temporal necessities.

Hence, we find this obligation stringently enforced by the direct authority of God in the old law. 1st. He took the priests from amongst the rest of the people and set them apart by themselves. 2nd. They were to have no share in the division of the promised land. 3rd. God promised that He Himself would be their portion and inheritance in the midst of the children of Israel (Num. xviii. 20.) He therefore ordained various tributes to be given to them in His own name. These were tithes, or the tenth part of the yearly produce of corn and fruits, and also of oxen, sheep, &c. 4th. He ordained, moreover, that the first fruits of the substance of the people should be offered to Him for the use and maintenance of the priests and levites.

This obligation remains in full force in the new or Christian dispensation. Our Lord laid down the general principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire," (Luke x. 7) and based the practical working of this principle upon the mutual good will, confidence and kindly relations which should exist between the priest and the people, directing the former to labour in the discharge of his duties from a motive of disinterested zeal, and the latter to minister to his temporal wants from a principle of religious generosity and gratitude. Hence, He said to his apostles, "Freely have you received, freely give." (Matthew x. 8). "Into whatsoever house you enter say:—'Peace be to this house.' And in the same house remain eating and drinking, such things as they have, for the labourer is worthy of his hire."—(Luke x.) St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, explains the same system, pointing out on the one side the obligation of the faithful to contribute to the support of their pastors, and on the other the zeal and disinterestedness with which the ministers of religion should labour for the glory of God and the salvation and sanctification of souls (see 1st to Corinthians ix. 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, verses down to the 19th verse inclusive.) Hence, the first Provincial Council of Toronto has decreed as follows:—"Whereas it is of the last importance that the churches and the pastors of churches should be honourably maintained, according to the circumstances of the time, and whereas this obligation is undoubtedly incumbent on the faithful, the Fathers decree that in accordance with the mind of the third Provincial Council of Quebec, the faithful should be always ready according to their means, to build and repair their churches, and also to support their pastors, and that the faithful who enjoy the labours and spiritual gifts of their pastors, are bound in justice and conscience to pay their dues (Decretum xvii.)

Inasmuch as the means and circumstances of missions, and of the faithful widely vary, it is morally impossible to lay down a uniform regulation suited to all. Our venerable predecessor in 1857, and again in 1861 ordained "that every family residing within the limits of each mission should pay to its respective pastor the sum of four dollars per year." This regulation was, doubtless, the wisest and best that could have been made for the circumstances of that period. But the circumstances of the present time are widely different. Then the great majority of our people were new settlers, had not their farms cleared and paid for, and were very straitened as to means. Now our people have their farms paid for and well cultivated, and are prosperous and happy. Then the price of living was extremely low; now it is comparatively high. Under these altered circumstances a new regulation for the honourable support of the pastor becomes a necessity.

(CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.)