



Tracts for Our Times

The Year of the Priest 2009-2010

Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests

Tract 3

September
2009

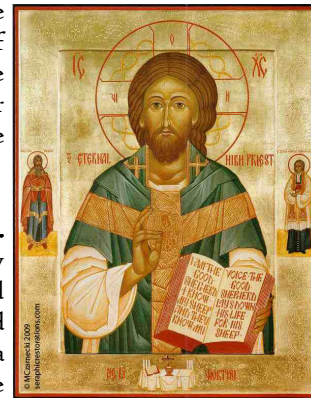
The image of the priesthood has been questioned by many in the modern era. Our society engenders a DIY culture in so many ways: is the ministry of the priest not another stumbling block in liberating society from needless structures and formalities? Certainly, those who wish to remind the Church of her errant clergy would seem to think that, at its heart, the priesthood is an aged institution, in need of dissolution. “The heart of the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus,” was the motto of Saint Jean-Marie Vianney, who will be proclaimed as the patron saint of all priests in this Year of the Priest.

The Holy Father has asked us, in this Year of the Priest, to be mindful of the role and ministry of our priests.

What, then, is the role and ministry of the priest in the modern world?

The priest is a minister. A priest is a man called by God to minister, in Word and Sacrament, the fullness of Christ. He offers worship to God that glorifies God and sanctifies His people. His ministry is never his own, though he dedicates himself to it entirely. Through no goodness of his own, he is able to offer to God the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of all people. He offers himself as Christ offered himself on the Cross; he decreases so that Christ may increase in the hearts of all the faithful. The priest is a sign of the grace of God in the world, set apart to serve the People of God. He is accountable to God for his ministry and is responsible for the development of mankind to the glory of Christ, the Great High Priest.

The priest shares in the sacrifice of Christ in a special way. This is what Saint Jean-Marie said of the priest: “O, how great is the priest! ... If he realised what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...” Explaining to his parishioners the importance



of the sacraments, he would say: “Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest... God is everything!” How can we not also think of all those priests who, giving their lives to Christ, are offended in their dignity, obstructed in their mission and persecuted, even at times to offering the supreme testimony of their own blood, sharing in the suffering of Christ on the Cross?

The priest should inspire the lay faithful to participate in the Cross of Christ. Many lay faithful have demonstrated the power of the Cross of Christ in their lives. Their witness to Jesus is profound and inspiring. Strengthened by the sacraments, administered by their priests, they stand before the whole world and proclaim Jesus as Lord and Christ, calling all people to commit their lives to him. This is a ministry of all Christian people, a nexus where the faithful of God and their priests share in the “priesthood of all believers”.

“ **The Lord descends from heaven at his voice.** ”

The priest is an ever-present sign of God’s mercy in the world. The priest should reflect the holiness of Christ, the Great High Priest. Being human, he does err. He is a sinner, a man, who has been called by God to participate in an intimate way in Christ’s priesthood. He acquires a new character at ordination. He identifies himself simultaneously as a priest of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, and a creature in need of God’s grace. His ministry is the ministry of the Church, of God. One should not forget that the faithfulness of God to his Church, in word and in sacrament, is independent of the holiness of the minister. Even though we fail, or our priests might fail, God can never be unfaithful. We are assured of this in the ministry of Reconciliation, where the priest can proclaim the mercy of God in the confessional.

Pope Benedict offers the following thoughts in his Letter to Priests: “There are situations which can never be sufficiently deplored where the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers. Then it is the world which finds grounds for scandal and rejection. What is most helpful to the Church in such cases is not only a frank and complete acknowledgment of the weaknesses of her ministers, but also a joyful and renewed realisation of the greatness of God’s gift, embodied in the splendid example of generous pastors, religious afire with love for God and for souls, and insightful, patient spiritual guides.” We pray for the ministry of all priests that they be configured more closely to Christ in holiness and humility.

The priest finds his identity as a witness to the Resurrection. The modern world, often hostile to religion, needs a special presence in the world. It is a presence of God working mysteriously in the ordinary lives of man. Priests are called, especially today, to be fearless custodians of the Gospel of Christ who died and rose from the dead. At this year's Chrism Mass, Pope Benedict asked the priests of the world, and indeed all Christian faithful, does the world recognise that you are an ambassador for Jesus Christ?

- Are we truly pervaded by the Word of God?
- Is that Word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world?
- Do we really know that Word?
- Do we love the Word?
- Are we deeply engaged with this Word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?

The priest bears the burdens of the Body of Christ. Certainly, too, is the priest a custodian of the People of God. He is not a social worker, but a pastor of souls. He is bound, by his love for Christ and the Church, to lead his flock to develop as human beings, in accordance with Christ's Will. How the priest promotes the Church's social teaching was examined Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. He cares as a father would; sometimes, he admonishes. He always prays and he always ministers, making the joys and sorrows, the hopes and desires, of the human people, his own joys and sorrows, his own hopes and desires. ✕

“ The world
needs the
presence of
God working
mysteriously in the
ordinary
lives of
man. ”

OFFICIAL PRAYER FOR THE YEAR OF THE PRIEST

Dear Lord,

*we pray that the Blessed Mother
wrap her mantle around your priests
and through her intercession
strengthen them for their ministry.*

*We pray that Mary will guide your priests
to follow her own words,
“Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5).*

*May your priests have the heart of St Joseph,
Mary's most chaste spouse.*

*May the Blessed Mother's own pierced heart
inspire them to embrace
all who suffer at the foot of the cross.*

*May your priests be holy,
filled with the fire of your love
seeking nothing but your greater glory
and the salvation of souls. Amen.*

Saint Jean-Marie Vianney, pray for us.

PLENARY INDULGENCE



Pope Benedict has granted Plenary Indulgence for the occasion of the Year for Priests.

All truly penitent Christian faithful who, in church, devotedly attend Holy Mass and offer prayers to Jesus Christ, supreme and eternal Priest, for the priests of the Church, or perform any good work to sanctify and mould them to His Heart, are granted Plenary Indulgence, on the condition that they have expiated their sins through Sacramental Confession and prayed in accordance with the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff.

This may be done on the opening and closing days of the Year for Priests, on the 150th anniversary of the death of St Jean-Marie Vianney, on the first Thursday of the month, or on any other day established by the ordinaries of particular places for the good of the faithful.

The elderly, the sick and all those who for any legitimate reason are unable to leave their homes, may still obtain Plenary Indulgence if, with the soul completely removed from attachment to any form of sin and with the intention of observing, as soon as they can, the usual three conditions, "on the days concerned, they pray for the sanctification of priests and offer their sickness and suffering to God through Mary, Queen of Apostles".

Partial Indulgence is offered to all faithful each time they pray five Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be, or any other duly approved prayer "in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to ask that priests maintain purity and sanctity of life".



"The following Tracts were published with the object of contributing something towards the practical revival of doctrines held by the great divines of our faith."

This was the intention of Cardinal Newman and his companions (known as the Oxford Tractarians) when they began publishing their *Tracts for the Times*.

The Port Elizabeth Oratory, faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church and the spirit of Saint Philip Neri, hope to contribute something to the faith and understanding of the People of God in Port Elizabeth, conforming their hearts and minds ever more closely to the Person of Jesus Christ.