

Year for Priests

As the Year for Priests progresses, it is ever more obvious what a blessing it is and how important it is, first for all priests and bishops, then for all faithful and, indeed, for the world. It is a time to (re-)focus, beyond the misgivings and misunderstandings, on the nature of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and work towards seeing it ever more clearly reflected in his priests. To this end, the Church has been providing many resources to help priests and bishops and all people of good will observe this Year. Such resources are available on the VEYO website at www.veyopeterboro.org as well as through the respective offices at the Vatican. Below you find some excerpts from recent reflections given out by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy.

“We are priests prior to any other reason, however good, to be ‘united more closely to Christ the High Priest’, united to Him who is our only salvation, the Love of our hearts, the Rock on which we build every act of our ministry, He who knows us more closely than we know our own selves, and whom we desire more than any other thing. Christ the High Priest draws us within himself. This union with Him, which the Sacrament of Order is, carries with it a participation in His offering: ‘Being united to Christ calls for renunciation. It means not wanting to impose our own way and our own will, not desiring to become someone else, but abandoning ourselves to him, however and wherever he wants to use us’ (Benedict XVI, Homily, Holy Mass of Chrism 9th April 2009). The expression, ‘to be united’ reminds us that none of this is our work, the result of our own efforts, but the work of Grace within us: it is the Spirit who unites us ontologically to Christ the Priest and gives us the strength to persevere, all the way to the end, in this participation in the divine work and thus also in the divine life. The ‘pure victim’ then, which Christ the Lord is, reminds each of us of the irreplaceable value of celibacy, which implies perfect continence for the Kingdom of Heaven, and that purity which renders our offering for our fellow man ‘pleasing unto God’. (from: Letter from the Congregation for the Clergy, October 2009)

“This special Year has been announced by the Holy Father for the good of priests, due to their irreplaceable importance in the Church. As such they have today a particular need to be supported and renewed spiritually and pastorally. ... They also need to be assisted and guided to renew in their hearts the true identity of the priesthood and the true meaning of celibacy. In this context, the renewal and reinvigoration of their priestly spirituality will be decisive, which has as its foundation in being true and unconditioned disciples of Jesus Christ, who has configured them to Himself, Head and Shepherd of the Church. For this discipleship, so determining of their lives, it will be of great help for priests to listen and to pray aloud the Word of God, the daily celebration of the Eucharist, the frequent use of the Sacrament of Confession, the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, frequent visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Holy Rosary and other means of spiritual enrichment and of personal encounter and intimacy with Jesus Christ. Also of great importance are the annual Spiritual Exercises and ongoing formation. Moreover, it is necessary to awaken the missionary consciousness of priests.

The Church knows there is a missionary urgency being experienced throughout the world, not only *ad gentes*, but also within the very flock of the Church already established for centuries in the Christian world. It is necessary to promote a true missionary urge in our Dioceses and in our parishes. All our countries have become a land of mission, in the strict sense. A new fire needs to be lit in our priests and in us ourselves, a new passion to make us arise and go to meet people where they live and work, to bring to them anew the Kerygma, the first proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, and of his Kingdom, to lead them to a personal and then a communitarian encounter with the Lord. Our beloved Pope, Benedict XVI, referring to the situation in the lands of age-old Christian tradition, has said, ‘We should give serious thought as to how to achieve a true evangelization in this day and age [...] It is not enough for us to strive to preserve the existing flock’ (Discourse to the German Bishops, 21st August 2005), but we need a true mission. It is not enough merely to welcome those who come to us, in the parish or in the parish house. There is an urgent necessity to arise and go in search above all of the many baptised who are distanced from participation in the life of our communities, and then to seek also those who know little or nothing of Jesus Christ. The mission has always renewed the Church. The same will also be true for priests when they go into the mission. This, then, is a whole programme to develop during this Year for Priests.” (from: Homily by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, September 2009)

“A Priest does not proclaim himself or his own ideas, or his personal and subjective interpretations of the one Eternal Word. We are called to acknowledge the supreme dignity of Him of whom we are the bearers, and as a consequence to fulfil such a service in a worthy manner. Such an awareness cannot but lead us to undertake a constant deepening of our appreciation of the Sacred Scriptures, ‘the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit’ (*Dei Verbum* 9); an appreciation which, while certainly exegetical and theological, is spiritual above all. The true knowledge of the Scriptures is that of the heart, which is born of daily contact with it, from *Lectio Divina* practiced in the footsteps of the great tradition of the Fathers, from deep meditation which gradually but effectively conforms the soul to the Gospel, transforming each priest into a ‘living Gospel’. We know well that ‘the Gospel is not just a word: Christ himself is the Gospel’ (Benedict XVI, *Homily*12/09/09), and we are called to conform ourselves to Him, even in exercising the ministry of preaching.” (from: Reflections of the Archbishop Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, August 2009)