

**From:** Julie Greer  
**Sent:** Monday, June 15, 2020 4:18 PM  
**To:** Julie Greer  
**Cc:** Lumpe, Fr. Michael  
**Subject:** Update for June 15  
**Attachments:** Day of Santification for Clerge.pdf; Letter of the Holy Father to Priests on the 160th anniversary of the death of the Curé of Ars, St John Vianney (4 August 2019) \_ Francis.html

Brother priests,

It was a great weekend for the Diocese of Columbus with the Ordinations to the Diaconate and Priesthood. Thank you for all your prayers. My one sadness is that we could not be together. We welcome Fathers Brown, Fulton and Keller to our Presbyterate.

On Friday we celebrate the Solemn Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As you know it is a day for the Sanctification of Priests and I had really hoped that we would be able to gather but again, as much as I would like to, I don't know that we all can gather and I don't want to exclude those whose health is more vulnerable. So, after much thought, consideration of different options and a bit of regret, I am going to ask that we meet via Zoom. I am looking at Vespers beginning at 4:00 PM on Friday, June 19, 2020. I will offer a few opening remarks, we will pray Vespers and Monsignor Frank Lane, who was to give the day of prayer for us on the day of the Chrism Mass and again at the hoped for day this week, has agreed to give a homily for our reflection during the Vespers.

In preparation for this Day of Prayer, I attach two documents: The letter of Pope Francis to Priests on August 4<sup>th</sup> of Last year Commemorating the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of St. John Vianney and a recent Reflection from Cardinal Stella on the Holy Father's in the context of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Please be assured of my special prayers, gratitude and spiritual closeness these days between the Feasts of Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart.

Bishop Brennan



## ***Office of the General Secretary***

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Most Reverend José H. Gomez  
Archbishop of Los Angeles  
*President*

**Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, S.T.D.**  
*General Secretary*

Msgr. Jeffrey D. Burrill, S.T.L.  
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*Associate General Secretaries*

### **MEMORANDUM**

To: All Bishops

From: Reverend Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, General Secretary *JBB*

Date: April 14, 2020

Subject: Day of Sanctification for the Clergy, June 19, 2020

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Your Eminence / Your Excellency,

I take this opportunity to convey to you, on behalf of Most Reverend José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, President, and through the courtesy of the Apostolic Nunciature, the enclosed letter, in Italian and in English, of His Eminence Beniamino Cardinal Stella, Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, regarding the celebration of the Day of Sanctification for the Clergy, celebrated on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 19, 2020.

Thank you for your attention to this memorandum.



3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008-3610

APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**Prot. N. 11113/20**

April 2, 2020

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to forward to you the letter, dated March 11, 2020, from the Congregation for Clergy regarding the upcoming Day of Sanctification for the Clergy, to be celebrated this year on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, June 19, 2020 (Prot. N. 2020 1132).

Please find in the enclosure the aforementioned letter and the accompanying message that offers five points of reflection for the clergy, drawn from the teaching of Pope Francis. Please also find in the enclosure an unofficial translation of the two texts by this Apostolic Nunciature.

I kindly ask that you share these materials with your brother bishops in the Conference and others who may find them useful.

With cordial regards and prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

✠ Christophe Pierre  
Apostolic Nuncio

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His Excellency  
The Most Reverend José H. GOMEZ, President  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 Fourth Street NE  
Washington, DC 20017

*(Enclosures)*



CONGREGATIO  
PRO CLERICIS

Dal Vaticano, 11 marzo 2020

Prot. N. 2020 1132

Eccellenza/Eminenza Reverendissima,

Il prossimo 19 giugno ricorre la Solennità del Sacratissimo Cuore di Gesù, in cui si celebra, ogni anno, la Giornata di Santificazione Sacerdotale.

Com'è noto, l'occasione è propizia per promuovere un momento di riflessione e meditazione sulla vita sacerdotale e sul ministero pastorale che i presbiteri, nelle diverse situazioni, sono chiamati a svolgere.

Al riguardo, questa Congregazione ha inteso riprendere alcuni passi significativi della Lettera che Papa Francesco ha indirizzato ai Sacerdoti il 4 agosto scorso, nel 160° anniversario della morte del Santo Curato d'Ars; da queste citazioni, che contengono tutte un riferimento al "Cuore" di Cristo e del presbitero, il Dicastero ha ricavato 5 parole-chiave, che potrebbero offrire degli spunti per la condivisione fraterna tra i presbiteri che, in quella Giornata, i Vescovi riterranno di dover promuovere.

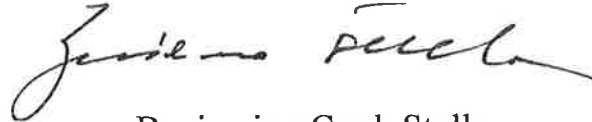
Al proposito, questa Congregazione suggerirebbe che, per la Giornata di Santificazione, si possa prevedere un tempo di preghiera e di incontro fraterno, durante il quale gli Ordinari potranno proporre una riflessione sulla traccia preparata a partire dalla suddetta Lettera di Papa Francesco, secondo le necessità del luogo e le opportunità pastorali.

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**Eminentissimi ed Eccellentissimi  
Presidenti Conferenze Episcopali  
Loro Sedi**

Con l'auspicio che questa occasione potrà rappresentare un momento importante di spiritualità e fraternità sacerdotale, La saluto cordialmente nel Signore e mi confermo con sensi di distinto/venerato ossequio,

dell'Eccellenza/Eminenza Vostra  
dev.mi



Beniamino Card. Stella  
*Prefetto*

+ Joël Mercier

✠ Joël Mercier  
*Arcivescovo Titolare di Rota*  
*Segretario*

+ Jorge C Patrón Wong

✠ Jorge Carlos Patrón Wong  
*Arcivescovo-Vescovo emerito di Papantla*  
*Segretario per i Seminari*

## Sacerdoti con il Cuore di Cristo

### Cinque brevi spunti di riflessioni, dal Magistero di Papa Francesco

Il 4 agosto 2019, nel 160° Anniversario della morte del Santo Curato d'Ars, Papa Francesco ha inviato una Lettera indirizzata ai Sacerdoti, per ringraziarli del loro generoso servizio e incoraggiarli ad abbracciare con amore la loro vocazione (PAPA FRANCESCO, *Lettera ai sacerdoti in occasione del 160° Anniversario della morte del Santo Curato d'Ars*, 4 agosto 2019).

In questo prezioso scritto, il Santo Padre usa spesso la parola “cuore”, da cui si può avviare una riflessione e una meditazione in occasione della Giornata di Santificazione del Clero, che si celebra ogni anno nel giorno della Solennità del Sacro Cuore di Gesù.

#### Gratitudine

*“Grazie per la gioia con cui avete saputo donare la vostra vita, mostrando un cuore che nel corso degli anni ha combattuto e lottato per non diventare angusto ed amaro ed essere, al contrario, quotidianamente allargato dall'amore di Dio e del suo popolo; un cuore che, come il buon vino, il tempo non ha inacidito, ma gli ha dato una qualità sempre più squisita; perché «eterna è la sua misericordia»”.*

**Un cuore grato.** Essere Sacerdoti secondo il Cuore di Cristo significa rivestirsi di Lui, fino ad avere i Suoi stessi sentimenti. Tra le tante virtù, il Cuore di Gesù è aperto alla gratitudine; Egli ringrazia il Padre per i prodigi che opera agli occhi dei piccoli, nascondendoli a chi, invece, chiuso nella presunzione della sapienza umana, non riesce a vederli (Cfr Mt 11,25). Per questo, la gratitudine è una qualità specificatamente cristiana e deve appartenere al modo di essere del pastore; San Paolo ci esorta, infatti, così: “State sempre lieti, pregate incessantemente, in ogni cosa rendete grazie” (1Ts 5,16). Il termine che traduce “rendete grazie” è “eucaristia”. Il Sacerdote è assimilato al Cuore di Cristo in modo speciale nella celebrazione eucaristica, che unisce al sacrificio d'amore del Signore per il Suo Popolo. Al contempo, Papa Francesco ha dato spesso voce al sentimento di gratitudine del Popolo di Dio nei confronti dei presbiteri, per il generoso servizio e l'offerta della loro esistenza.

## Misericordia

*“Attraverso gli scalini della misericordia possiamo scendere fino al punto più basso della condizione umana – fragilità e peccato inclusi – e ascendere fino al punto più alto della perfezione divina: «Siate misericordiosi come è misericordioso il Padre vostro». E così essere «capaci di riscaldare il cuore delle persone, di camminare nella notte con loro, di saper dialogare e anche di scendere nella loro notte, nel loro buio senza perdersi»”.*

**Un cuore misericordioso.** Quando Gesù attraversa i villaggi e le città, passa sanando e beneficiando tutti coloro che sono prigionieri del male (Cfr. At 10,38). Gesù non ha paura di contaminarsi con la fragilità umana, ma, anzi, scende negli abissi della debolezza umana e del peccato, per rivelare il Cuore misericordioso del Padre che rialza dalle cadute ogni Suo figlio e lo chiama alla gioia del perdono. Il nome di Dio che Gesù ci rivela è “misericordia”. Nell’Omelia della Santa Messa per la chiusura del Giubileo della Misericordia, il Santo Padre affermò che *“la vera porta della misericordia è il Cuore di Cristo”*.

Il Sacerdote, configurato a Cristo, è anzitutto il ministro della misericordia e della riconciliazione. Portando scolpita nel cuore la memoria dell’essere stato guardato e chiamato dal Signore non per i meriti personali, e facendo ogni giorno l’esperienza dell’essere toccato dalla misericordia di Dio in tutto ciò che vive e che opera, egli deve diventare segno accogliente dell’amore di Dio che vuole raggiungere tutti, in ogni situazione della vita, per risanare dal male. Abbiamo bisogno di Sacerdoti dal tratto misericordioso, capaci di accogliere, ascoltare, e accompagnare i fratelli, in special modo nel Sacramento della Riconciliazione.

## Compassione

*“Grazie per tutte le volte in cui, lasciandovi commuovere nelle viscere, avete accolto quanti erano caduti, curato le loro ferite, offrendo calore ai loro cuori, mostrando tenerezza e compassione come il Samaritano della parabola (cfr Lc 10,25-37). Niente è così urgente come queste cose: prossimità, vicinanza, essere vicini alla carne del fratello sofferente. Quanto bene fa l’esempio di un sacerdote che si avvicina e non si allontana dalle ferite dei suoi fratelli. Riflesso del cuore del pastore che ha imparato il gusto spirituale di sentirsi uno con il suo popolo”.*

**Un cuore compassionevole.** I Vangeli ci narrano spesso che Gesù, alla vista delle folle affaticate e oppresse, sente profonda compassione (cfr. Mt 9,36). Egli infatti ha “viscere che fremono”, specialmente quando incontra il dolore e la sofferenza procurate dalla malattia, dall'emarginazione e da ogni forma di povertà materiale e spirituale; come Buon samaritano, pieno di compassione, Egli si ferma davanti alla carne ferita dei fratelli, la risana e la guarisce, diventando manifestazione vivente dell'amore di Dio Padre. Ai Sacerdoti, ministri del Cristo, è richiesto lo stesso cuore compassionevole, che si esprime nella vicinanza, nella partecipazione reale e integrale alle sofferenze e ai travagli della gente, nella capacità di relazioni che riaccendono la speranza, nella cura delle ferite del Popolo, in special modo attraverso la mediazione della grazia sacramentale.

### **Vigilanza**

*“Delusi dalla realtà, dalla Chiesa o da noi stessi, possiamo vivere la tentazione di aggrapparci ad una tristezza dolciastra, che i padri dell'Oriente chiamavano accidia...Tristezza che rende sterili tutti i tentativi di trasformazione e conversione, propagando risentimento e animosità...Fratelli, quando quella tristezza dolciastra minaccia di impadronirsi della nostra vita o della nostra comunità, senza spaventarci né preoccuparci, ma con determinazione, chiediamo e facciamo chiedere allo Spirito che «venga a risvegliarci, a dare uno scossone al nostro torpore, a liberarci dall'inerzia! Sfidiamo l'abitudinarietà, apriamo bene gli occhi e gli orecchi, e soprattutto il **cuore**, per lasciarci smuovere da ciò che succede intorno a noi e dal grido della Parola viva ed efficace del Risorto»”*

**Un cuore vigilante.** Più volte Gesù ha richiamato l'importanza della vigilanza del cuore che, come servi fedeli, ci fa attendere con prontezza la venuta del padrone della vigna; si tratta di fare spazio al dono dello Spirito Santo che, anche in mezzo agli impegni quotidiani e alle oscurità del tempo presente, ci fa discernere la presenza del Signore, ci rende attenti alla Sua Parola, ci fa operosi nella carità cosicché non si spenga l'olio nella lampada della nostra vita e, come le vergini sagge, andiamo incontro allo Sposo che viene. Il cuore si mantiene vigilante, però, anche attraverso una lotta spirituale; Gesù stesso la affronta nel deserto, vincendo le tentazioni del demonio, e alla fine della Sua vita, richiamando i suoi discepoli che, nel Getsemani, si sono addormentati: “Vegliate e pregate, per non entrare in tentazione” (Mt 26,41). Succede anche al Sacerdote di avvertire quella che Papa Francesco ha chiamato “la stanchezza



della speranza”, quell’amarezza interiore che spesso nasce dalla distanza tra le aspettative personali e i frutti visibili dell’apostolato, o quell’aridità del cuore che spesso conduce a trascinare gli impegni pastorali e la stessa preghiera nell’abitudine, nella rassegnazione e perfino nell’incuria. Occorre invece lasciarsi sempre “risvegliare” dalla Parola del Signore e dal grido del Popolo di Dio.

## **Coraggio**

*“Per mantenere il **cuore** coraggioso è necessario non trascurare questi due legami costitutivi della nostra identità: il primo, con Gesù. Ogni volta che ci sleghiamo da Gesù o trascuriamo la nostra relazione con Lui, a poco a poco il nostro impegno si inaridisce e le nostre lampade rimangono senza l’olio in grado di illuminare la vita (cfr Mt 25,1-13)...In questo senso, vorrei incoraggiarvi a non trascurare l’accompagnamento spirituale, avendo un fratello con cui parlare, confrontarsi, discutere e discernere in piena fiducia e trasparenza il proprio cammino...L’altro legame costitutivo: aumentate e nutrite il vincolo con il vostro popolo. Non isolatevi dalla vostra gente e dai presbiteri o dalle comunità. Ancora meno non rinchiudetevi in gruppi chiusi ed elitari. Questo, alla fine, soffoca e avvelena lo spirito. Un ministro coraggioso è un ministro sempre in uscita”.*

**Un cuore coraggioso.** Contemplando il Cuore di Gesù, possiamo cogliere i due legami fondamentali, a partire dai quali Egli vive la propria missione: il Padre Celeste e il popolo. I Vangeli ci mostrano come, nella giornata tipo di Gesù, si alternano e si intrecciano in un sapiente equilibrio, la cura della relazione con Dio e la solidarietà attiva verso i fratelli. La carità dei suoi gesti non è mai separata dal silenzio e dalla preghiera, e la stanchezza di un ministero che non gli lascia neanche il tempo di mangiare non è mai disgiunta dalla ferma volontà di ritirarsi in disparte, in luoghi solitari, per coltivare l’intimo colloquio d’amore con Dio Padre. Allo stesso modo, il Sacerdote secondo il Cuore di Cristo è colui che “abita” tra il Signore a cui ha consacrato la vita e il Popolo che è stato chiamato a servire; egli potrà vivere una fruttuosa carità pastorale, nella misura in cui non si spegnerà in Lui la vita interiore, la preghiera personale e comunitaria e il lasciarsi guidare nell’accompagnamento spirituale.

Le cinque parole proposte per la Giornata di Santificazione del Clero, tratte dalla Lettera che Papa Francesco ha rivolto ai Sacerdoti nell'agosto scorso, si riferiscono a un cuore sacerdotale realmente "consacrato" a quello di Cristo, ossia radicato nella relazione personale con Lui e perciò configurato ai Suoi stessi sentimenti.

Come è stato rilevato in ambito psichiatrico e psicoterapeuta circa alcuni problemi di natura morale e affettiva della vita dei preti, la vitalità e la cura di questo rapporto spirituale con Dio, unitamente allo sviluppo di una buona maturità umana e di sane relazioni interpersonali, costituisce l'ambiente migliore per la custodia del celibato sacerdotale e della spiritualità presbiterale.

Ciò che rappresenta invece un alto potenziale di rischio nella vita del prete è quello che è stato chiamato "**deficit di intimità**". Ogni stato di vita, per essere abbracciato integralmente e protetto da incursioni minacciose, deve coltivare una particolare "relazione intima" che ne valorizzi le possibilità e ne argini i rischi: per un Sacerdote si tratta dell'amicizia personale e quotidiana con il Signore.

Il presupposto umano, psicologico e spirituale per la buona riuscita di una vita sacerdotale, cioè, è **la relazione intima con Dio**. Il deficit di intimità non è altro che l'inaridimento della vita spirituale e, di conseguenza, il venir meno di quell'amicizia profonda, interiore e vitale con il Signore, che costituisce la base per la fecondità personale e pastorale. Il prete che non prega più con fedeltà e che trascura gli elementi portanti della sua relazione di intimità con il Signore accumula un "deficit" pericoloso, che può generare senso di vuoto, percezione di frustrazione e insoddisfazione, difficoltà nella gestione della solitudine, dei bisogni e degli affetti, fino al rischio di esposizione in amicizie e legami "esterni" che, a quel punto, potrebbero far sbriciolare un edificio umano-spirituale già segnato da diverse crepe.

Perché il Sacerdote sia configurato al Cuore di Cristo occorre che il punto fermo della sua vita quotidiana e il fondamento della sua struttura umana e spirituale sia costituito da quell'humus interiore costituito dalla profonda amicizia personale con il Signore, a partire dalla quale la gestione della propria vita, il celibato e la missione apostolica possono essere psicologicamente vivibili e spiritualmente fecondi.

**UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION**

Vatican City, March 11, 2020

Prot. N. 2020 1132

Your Eminence/ Your Excellency,

The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus occurs on June 19 next, when the Day of Sanctification for the Clergy is celebrated every year.

As you know, it is a propitious opportunity to promote a moment of reflection and meditation on priestly life and the pastoral ministry that priests are called to carry out in different situations.

In this regard, this Congregation intended to recapture some significant passages from the Letter that Pope Francis addressed to priests on August 4 last, on the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars; from these quotations, which all contain a reference to the “Heart” of Christ and of the priest, this Dicastery has selected 5 key words that could offer ideas for the fraternal sharing among priests which the bishops might wish to promote on that Day.

To this end, this Congregation would suggest that, for the Day of Sanctification, a time of prayer and fraternal meeting be set aside, during which the Ordinaries may propose a reflection on the theme drawn from the aforementioned Letter of Pope Francis, according to local needs and pastoral circumstances.

With the hope that this occasion could represent an important moment of priestly spirituality and fraternity, I cordially greet you in the Lord and renew my sentiments of profound esteem,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Beniamino Card. Stella

*Prefect*

✠ Joël Mercier  
Titular Archbishop of Rota  
*Secretary*

✠ Jorge Carlos Patrón Wong  
Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus of Papantla  
*Secretary for Seminaries*

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**To The Most Eminent & The Most Excellent  
Presidents of Episcopal Conferences  
At Their Sees**

## **Priests with the Heart of Christ**

### **Five short points for reflection, from the Magisterium of Pope Francis**

On August 4, 2019, the 160th Anniversary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars, Pope Francis addressed a letter to priests thanking them for their generous service and encouraging them to embrace their vocation with love (POPE FRANCIS, *Letter to Priests on occasion of the 160th Anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars*, August 4, 2019).

In this precious writing, the Holy Father makes frequent use of the word “heart”, which can serve as a starting point for a reflection and meditation on the occasion of the Sanctification Day for the Clergy, celebrated every year on the day of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

#### **Gratitude**

*“Thank you for the joy with which you have offered your lives, revealing a heart that over the years has refused to become closed and bitter, but has grown daily in love for God and his people. A heart that, like good wine, has not turned sour but become richer with age. «For his mercy endures forever»”.*

***A grateful heart.*** Being priests after the Heart of Christ means putting on Him, to the point of having His own feelings. Among the many virtues, the Heart of Jesus is open to gratitude; He thanks the Father for the wonders that He does in the eyes of the little ones, hiding them from those who, closed in the presumption of human wisdom instead, cannot see them (cf. Mt 11: 25). For this reason, gratitude is a specifically Christian quality and must belong to the shepherd’s way of being. Indeed, St. Paul exhorts us thus: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all circumstances give thanks” (1 Ts 5:16). The term that translates as “give thanks” is “Eucharist”. The priest is assimilated to the Heart of Christ in a special way in the Eucharistic celebration, which is united to the Lord’s sacrifice of love for His people. At the same time, Pope Francis has often given voice to the People of

God's feeling of gratitude towards priests for their generous service and the offering of their lives.

### **Mercy**

*“On the ladder of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condition – including weakness and sin – and at the same time experience the heights of divine perfection: «Be merciful as the Father is merciful». In this way, we are «capable of warming people's hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into their night and their darkness, without losing our way».*

***A merciful heart.*** When Jesus passes through villages and towns, he goes by healing and benefiting all those who are prisoners of evil (cf. Acts 10:38). Jesus is not afraid of contaminating himself with human weakness, but, on the contrary, he descends into the abyss of human weakness and sin to reveal the Father's merciful Heart that raises every child from the falls and calls him to the joy of forgiveness. The name of God that Jesus reveals to us is “mercy”. In the homily of the Holy Mass for the Closing of the Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father affirms that *“the true door of mercy is the Heart of Christ”*.

The priest, configured to Christ, is above all the minister of mercy and reconciliation. Carrying in his heart the memory of having been looked upon and called by the Lord not because of personal merits, and living each day the experience of being touched by God's mercy in all that he is and does, the priest must become a welcoming sign of the love of God who wants to reach everyone, in every situation of life, in order to heal from evil. We need priests with a merciful heart, capable of welcoming, listening, and accompanying their brothers and sisters, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### **Compassion**

*“Thank you for the times when, with great emotion, you embraced sinners, healed wounds, warmed hearts and showed the tenderness and compassion of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-27). Nothing is more necessary than this: accessibility, closeness, readiness to draw*

*near to the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. How powerful is the example of a priest who makes himself present and does not flee the wounds of his brothers and sisters! It mirrors the heart of a shepherd who has developed a spiritual taste for being one with his people”.*

***A compassionate heart.*** The Gospels often tell us that Jesus, at the sight of the tired and oppressed crowds, feels deep compassion (cf. Mt 9:36). In fact, he has a “heart wrenching” emotion, especially when he encounters the pain and suffering caused by illness, marginalization and all forms of material and spiritual poverty; like the Good Samaritan, full of compassion, He stops before the wounded brothers and sisters, heals and cures them, becoming a living manifestation of the love of God the Father. The same compassionate heart is asked of priests, ministers of Christ; that which is expressed in closeness, in the real and full participation in people’s sufferings and hardships, in the capacity for relationships that rekindle hope, in the care of people’s wounds and, in a special way, through the mediation of sacramental grace.

### **Vigilance**

*“Disappointment with life, with the Church or with ourselves can tempt us to latch onto a sweet sorrow or sadness that the Eastern Fathers called acedia...A sadness that stifles every effort at change and conversion by sowing resentment and hostility...Dear brothers, when that sweet sorrow threatens to take hold of our lives or our communities, without being fearful or troubled, yet with firm resolution, let us together beg the Spirit to «rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord»”.*

***A vigilant heart.*** Several times Jesus recalled the importance of vigilance of the heart which makes us wait promptly as faithful servants for the coming of the owner of the vineyard; it is a question of making room for the gift of the Holy Spirit who, even in the midst of daily commitments and the obscurities of the present time, makes us discern the presence of the

Lord, makes us attentive to His Word, makes us active in charity so that the oil in the lamp of our life would not run out and, like the wise virgins, we would be ready to welcome the Bridegroom who comes. The heart even remains vigilant through a spiritual struggle; Jesus himself confronts such in the desert, overcoming the temptations of the devil, and at the end of His life, reminding his disciples who fell asleep in Gethsemane: “Watch and pray, that you may not undergo the test” (Mt 26:41). The priest should also be warned of what Pope Francis called the “tiredness of hope”, that inner bitterness that often arises from the distance between personal expectations and the visible fruits of the apostolate, or that dryness of the heart that often leads to dragging pastoral commitments and the same prayer in habit, in resignation and even in carelessness. Instead, we must always let ourselves be “awakened” by the Word of the Lord and by the cry of the People of God.

### **Courage**

*“For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not neglect the dialectic that determines our identity. First, our relationship with Jesus. Whenever we turn away from Jesus or neglect our relationship with him, slowly but surely our commitment begins to fade and our lamps lose the oil needed to light up our lives (cf. Mt 25:1-13)...In this regard, I would encourage you not to neglect spiritual direction. Look for a brother with whom you can speak, reflect, discuss and discern, sharing with complete trust and openness your journey...The other essential aspect of this dialectic is our relationship to our people. Do not withdraw from your people, your presbyterates and your communities, much less seek refuge in closed and elitist groups. Ultimately, this stifles and poisons the soul. A minister whose “heart is encouraged” is a minister always on the move”.*

***A courageous heart.*** By contemplating the Heart of Jesus, we can grasp the two fundamental bonds from which He lives own his mission: the Heavenly Father and the People. The Gospels show us how, in a typical day of Jesus, the care of the relationship with God and the active solidarity towards his brothers and sisters alternate and intertwine in a wise balance. The charity of his gestures is never separated from silence and prayer,

and the tiredness from a ministry that does not even allow him time to eat is never separated from the firm will to withdraw to solitary places in order to cultivate the intimate conversation of love with God the Father. In the same way, the priest molded after the Heart of Christ is one who “lives” between the Lord to whom he has consecrated his life and the People whom he has been called to serve; he will be able to live a fruitful pastoral charity insofar as his inner life, his personal and community prayer and his letting himself be guided in spiritual accompaniment will not be extinguished.

The five words proposed for the Day of Sanctification of the Clergy, taken from the Letter that Pope Francis addressed to priests last August, refer to a priestly heart truly “consecrated” to that of Christ, that is, rooted in the personal relationship with Him and therefore configured to His feelings.

As has been pointed out in the psychiatric and psychotherapist field regarding some moral and emotional problems in the life of priests, the vitality and care of this spiritual relationship with God, together with the development of a good human maturity and healthy interpersonal relationships, constitutes the best environment for the safeguarding of priestly celibacy and priestly spirituality.

What instead represents a potentially high risk in the life of the priest is the so-called “**intimacy deficit**”. Every state of life, in order to be fully embraced and protected from threatening attacks, must cultivate a particular “intimate relationship” that enhances its possibilities and limits its risks: for a priest, it is a matter of personal and daily friendship with the Lord.

Thus, the human, psychological and spiritual prerequisite for the successful outcome of a priestly life is the **intimate relationship with God**. The deficit of intimacy is nothing more than the drying up of the spiritual life and, consequently, the loss of that deep, interior and vital friendship with the Lord which forms the basis for personal and pastoral fruitfulness. The priest who no longer prays faithfully and who neglects the basic elements of his intimate relationship with the Lord accumulates a dangerous “deficit”, which can generate



a sense of emptiness, a perception of frustration and dissatisfaction, difficulty in managing loneliness, needs and affections to the point of exposing oneself to danger in friendships and “external” bonds which, at that point, could cause a human-spiritual building, already marked by several cracks, to crumble.

For the priest to be configured to the Heart of Christ, it is necessary that the underlying point of his daily life and the foundation of his human and spiritual structure be constituted by that inner humus formed by a deep personal friendship with the Lord, which makes the management of his life, celibacy and apostolic mission psychologically viable and spiritually fruitful.



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PRIESTS  
ON THE 160th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH  
OF THE HOLY CURÉ OF ARS, ST JOHN VIANNEY**

To my Brother Priests

*Dear Brothers,*

A hundred and sixty years have passed since the death of the holy Curé of Ars, whom Pope [Pius XI](#) proposed as the patron of parish priests throughout the world.[\[1\]](#) On this, his feast day, I write this letter not only to parish priests but to all of you, my brother priests, who have quietly “left all behind” in order to immerse yourselves in the daily life of your communities. Like the Curé of Ars, you serve “in the trenches”, bearing the burden of the day and the heat (cf. *Mt 20:12*), confronting an endless variety of situations in your effort to care for and accompany God’s people. I want to say a word to each of you who, often without fanfare and at personal cost, amid weariness, infirmity and sorrow, carry out your mission of service to God and to your people. Despite the hardships of the journey, you are writing the finest pages of the priestly life.

Some time ago, I shared with the Italian bishops my worry that, in more than a few places, our priests feel themselves attacked and blamed for crimes they did not commit. I mentioned that priests need to find in their bishop an older brother and a father who reassures them in these difficult times, encouraging and supporting them along the way.[\[2\]](#)

As an older brother and a father, I too would like in this letter *to thank you* in the name of the holy and faithful People of God for all that you do for them, and *to encourage you* never to forget the words that the Lord spoke with great love to us on the day of our ordination. Those words are the source of our joy: “I no longer call you servants... I call you friends” (*Jn 15:15*).[\[3\]](#)

## PAIN

“I have seen the suffering of my people” (Ex 3:7)

In these years, we have become more attentive to the cry, often silent and suppressed, of our brothers and sisters who were victims of the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and sexual abuse on the part of ordained ministers. This has been a time of great suffering in the lives of those who experienced such abuse, but also in the lives of their families and of the entire People of God.

As you know, we are firmly committed to carrying out the reforms needed to encourage from the outset a culture of pastoral care, so that the culture of abuse will have no room to develop, much less continue. This task is neither quick nor easy: it demands commitment on the part of all. If in the past, omission may itself have been a kind of response, today we desire conversion, transparency, sincerity and solidarity with victims to become our concrete way of moving forward. This in turn will help make us all the more attentive to every form of human suffering.[4]

This pain has also affected priests. I have seen it in the course of my pastoral visits in my own diocese and elsewhere, in my meetings and personal conversations with priests. Many have shared with me their outrage at what happened and their frustration that “for all their hard work, they have to face the damage that was done, the suspicion and uncertainty to which it has given rise, and the doubts, fears and disheartenment felt by more than a few”.<sup>[5]</sup> I have received many letters from priests expressing those feelings. At the same time, I am comforted by my meetings with pastors who recognize and share the pain and suffering of the victims and of the People of God, and have tried to find words and actions capable of inspiring hope.

Without denying or dismissing the harm caused by some of our brothers, it would be unfair not to express our gratitude to all those priests who faithfully and generously spend their lives in the service of others (cf. 2 Cor 12:15). They embody a spiritual fatherhood capable of weeping with those who weep. Countless priests make of their lives a work of mercy in areas or situations that are often hostile, isolated or ignored, even at the risk of their lives. I acknowledge and appreciate your courageous and steadfast example; in these times of turbulence, shame and pain, you demonstrate that you have joyfully put your lives on the line for the sake of the Gospel.<sup>[6]</sup>

I am convinced that, to the extent that we remain faithful to God’s will, these present times of ecclesial purification will make us more joyful and humble, and prove, in the not distant future, very fruitful. “Let us not grow discouraged! The Lord is purifying his Bride and converting all of us to himself. He is letting us be put to the test in order to make us realize that without him we are simply dust. He is rescuing us from hypocrisy, from the spirituality of appearances. He is breathing forth his Spirit in order to restore the beauty of his Bride, caught in adultery. We can benefit from rereading the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. It is the history of the Church, and each of us can say it

is our history too. In the end, through your sense of shame, you will continue to act as a shepherd. Our humble repentance, expressed in silent tears before these atrocious sins and the unfathomable grandeur of God's forgiveness, is the beginning of a renewal of our holiness".[7]

## GRATITUDE

"I do not cease to give thanks for you" (*Eph* 1:16).

Vocation, more than our own choice, is a response to the Lord's unmerited call. We do well to return constantly to those passages of the Gospel where we see Jesus praying, choosing and calling others "to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message" (*Mk* 3:14).

Here I think of a great master of the priestly life in my own country, Father Lucio Gera. Speaking to a group of priests at a turbulent time in Latin America, he told them: "Always, but especially in times of trial, we need to return to those luminous moments when we experienced the Lord's call to devote our lives to his service". I myself like to call this "the deuteronomic memory of our vocation"; it makes each of us go back "to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame, I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters. That flame ignites a humble joy, a joy which sorrow and distress cannot dismay, a good and gentle joy".[8]

One day, each of us spoke up and said "yes", a "yes" born and developed in the heart of the Christian community thanks to those "saints next door"[9] who showed us by their simple faith that it was worthwhile committing ourselves completely to the Lord and his kingdom. A "yes" whose implications were so momentous that often we find it hard to imagine all the goodness that it continues to produce. How beautiful it is when an elderly priest sees or is visited by those children – now adults – whom he baptized long ago and who now gratefully introduce a family of their own! At times like this, we realize that we were anointed to anoint others, and that God's anointing never disappoints. I am led to say with the Apostle: "I do not cease to give thanks for you" (cf. *Eph* 1:16) and for all the good that you have done.

Amid trials, weakness and the consciousness of our limitations, "the worst temptation of all is to keep brooding over our troubles"[10] for then we lose our perspective, our good judgement and our courage. At those times, it is important – I would even say crucial – to cherish the memory of the Lord's presence in our lives and his merciful gaze, which inspired us to put our lives on the line for him and for his People. And to find the strength to persevere and, with the Psalmist, to raise our own song of praise, "for his mercy endures forever" (*Ps* 136).

Gratitude is always a powerful weapon. Only if we are able to contemplate and feel genuine gratitude for all those ways we have experienced God's love, generosity, solidarity and trust, as well as his forgiveness, patience, forbearance and compassion, will we allow the Spirit to grant us

the freshness that can renew (and not simply patch up) our life and mission. Like Peter on the morning of the miraculous draught of fishes, may we let the recognition of all the blessings we have received awaken in us the amazement and gratitude that can enable us to say: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (*Lk* 5:8). Only then to hear the Lord repeat his summons: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be fishers of men” (*Lk* 5:10). “For his mercy endures forever”.

Dear brother priests, I thank you for your fidelity to the commitments you have made. It is a sign that, in a society and culture that glorifies the ephemeral, there are still people unafraid to make lifelong promises. In effect, we show that we continue to believe in God, who has never broken his covenant, despite our having broken it countless times. In this way, we celebrate the fidelity of God, who continues to trust us, to believe in us and to count on us, for all our sins and failings, and who invites us to be faithful in turn. Realizing that we hold this treasure in earthen vessels (cf. *2 Cor* 4:7), we know that the Lord triumphs through weakness (cf. *2 Cor* 12:9). He continues to sustain us and to renew his call, repaying us a hundredfold (cf. *Mk* 10:29-30). “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for the joy with which you have offered your lives, revealing a heart that over the years has refused to become closed and bitter, but has grown daily in love for God and his people. A heart that, like good wine, has not turned sour but become richer with age. “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for working to strengthen the bonds of fraternity and friendship with your brother priests and your bishop, providing one another with support and encouragement, caring for those who are ill, seeking out those who keep apart, visiting the elderly and drawing from their wisdom, sharing with one another and learning to laugh and cry together. How much we need this! But thank you too for your faithfulness and perseverance in undertaking difficult missions, or for those times when you have had to call a brother priest to order. “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for your witness of persistence and patient endurance (*hypomoné*) in pastoral ministry. Often, with the *parrhesía* of the shepherd,<sup>[11]</sup> we find ourselves arguing with the Lord in prayer, as Moses did in courageously interceding for the people (cf. *Num* 14:13-19; *Ex* 32:30-32; *Dt* 9:18-21). “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for celebrating the Eucharist each day and for being merciful shepherds in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, neither rigorous nor lax, but deeply concerned for your people and accompanying them on their journey of conversion to the new life that the Lord bestows on us all. We know that on the ladder of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condition – including weakness and sin – and at the same time experience the heights of divine perfection: “Be merciful as the Father is merciful”.<sup>[12]</sup> In this way, we are “capable of warming people’s hearts, walking at their side in the dark, talking with them and even entering into their night and their darkness, without losing our way”.<sup>[13]</sup> “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for anointing and fervently proclaiming to all, “in season and out of season” (cf. *2 Tim* 4:2) the Gospel of Jesus Christ, probing the heart of your community “in order to discover where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren”.<sup>[14]</sup> “For his mercy endures forever”.

Thank you for the times when, with great emotion, you embraced sinners, healed wounds, warmed hearts and showed the tenderness and compassion of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-27). Nothing is more necessary than this: accessibility, closeness, readiness to draw near to the flesh of our suffering brothers and sisters. How powerful is the example of a priest who makes himself present and does not flee the wounds of his brothers and sisters!<sup>[15]</sup> It mirrors the heart of a shepherd who has developed a spiritual taste for being one with his people,<sup>[16]</sup> a pastor who never forgets that he has come from them and that by serving them he will find and express his most pure and complete identity. This in turn will lead to adopting a simple and austere way of life, rejecting privileges that have nothing to do with the Gospel. “For his mercy endures forever”.

Finally, let us give thanks for the holiness of the faithful People of God, whom we are called to shepherd and through whom the Lord also shepherds and cares for us. He blesses us with the gift of contemplating that faithful People “in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant”.<sup>[17]</sup> Let us be grateful for each of them, and in their witness find support and encouragement. “For his mercy endures forever”.

## ENCOURAGEMENT

“I want [your] hearts to be encouraged” (*Col* 2:2)

My second great desire is, in the words of Saint Paul, to offer encouragement as we strive to renew our priestly spirit, which is above all the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faced with painful experiences, all of us need to be comforted and encouraged. The mission to which we are called does not exempt us from suffering, pain and even misunderstanding.<sup>[18]</sup> Rather, it requires us to face them squarely and to accept them, so that the Lord can transform them and conform us more closely to himself. “Ultimately, the lack of a heartfelt and prayerful acknowledgment of our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively within us, for no room is left for bringing about the potential good that is part of a sincere and genuine journey of growth”.<sup>[19]</sup>

One good way of testing our hearts as pastors is to ask how we confront suffering. We can often act like the levite or the priest in the parable, stepping aside and ignoring the injured man (cf. *Lk* 10:31-32). Or we can draw near in the wrong way, viewing situations in the abstract and taking refuge in commonplaces, such as: “That’s life...”, or “Nothing can be done”. In this way, we yield to

an uneasy fatalism. Or else we can draw near with a kind of aloofness that brings only isolation and exclusion. “Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world...”<sup>[20]</sup> Far from making us compassionate, this ends up holding us back from confronting our own wounds, the wounds of others and consequently the wounds of Jesus himself.<sup>[21]</sup>

Along these same lines, I would mention another subtle and dangerous attitude, which, as Bernanos liked to say, is “the most precious of the devil's potions”.<sup>[22]</sup> It is also the most harmful for those of us who would serve the Lord, for it breeds discouragement, desolation and despair.<sup>[23]</sup> Disappointment with life, with the Church or with ourselves can tempt us to latch onto a *sweet sorrow* or sadness that the Eastern Fathers called *acedia*. Cardinal Tomáš Špidlík described it in these terms: “If we are assailed by sadness at life, at the company of others or at our own isolation, it is because we lack faith in God’s providence and his works... Sadness paralyzes our desire to persevere in our work and prayer; it makes us hard to live with... The monastic authors who treated this vice at length call it the worst enemy of the spiritual life.”<sup>[24]</sup>

All of us are aware of a sadness that can turn into a habit and lead us slowly to accept evil and injustice by quietly telling us: “It has always been like this”. A sadness that stifles every effort at change and conversion by sowing resentment and hostility. “That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life of the Spirit, which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ”<sup>[25]</sup>, to which we have been called. Dear brothers, when that *sweet sorrow* threatens to take hold of our lives or our communities, without being fearful or troubled, yet with firm resolution, let us together beg the Spirit to “rouse us from our torpor, to free us from our inertia. Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord”.<sup>[26]</sup>

Let me repeat: in times of difficulty, we all need God’s consolation and strength, as well as that of our brothers and sisters. All of us can benefit from the touching words that Saint Paul addressed to his communities: “I pray that you may not lose heart over [my] sufferings” (*Eph* 3:13), and “I want [your] hearts to be encouraged” (*Col* 2:22). In this way, we can carry out the mission that the Lord gives us anew each day: to proclaim “good news of great joy for all the people” (*Lk* 2:10). Not by presenting intellectual theories or moral axioms about the way things ought to be, but as men who in the midst of pain have been transformed and transfigured by the Lord and, like Job, can exclaim: “I knew you then only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes” (*Job* 42:2). Without this foundational experience, all of our hard work will only lead to frustration and disappointment.

In our own lives, we have seen how “with Christ, joy is constantly born anew”.<sup>[27]</sup> Although there are different stages in this experience, we know that, despite our frailties and sins, “with a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, God makes it



possible for us to lift up our heads and start anew”.<sup>[28]</sup> That joy is not the fruit of our own thoughts or decisions, but of the confidence born of knowing the enduring truth of Jesus’ words to Peter. At times of uncertainty, remember those words: “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (*Lk 22:32*). The Lord is the first to pray and fight for you and for me. And he invites us to enter fully into his own prayer. There may well be moments when we too have to enter into “the prayer of Gethsemane, that most human and dramatic of Jesus’ prayers... For there we find supplication, sorrow, anguish and even bewilderment (*Mk 14:33ff.*)”.<sup>[29]</sup>

We know that it is not easy to stand before the Lord and let his gaze examine our lives, heal our wounded hearts and cleanse our feet of the worldliness accumulated along the way, which now keeps us from moving forward. In prayer, we experience the blessed “insecurity” which reminds us that we are disciples in need of the Lord’s help, and which frees us from the promethean tendency of “those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules”.<sup>[30]</sup>

Dear brothers, Jesus, more than anyone, is aware of our efforts and our accomplishments, our failures and our mistakes. He is the first to tell us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (*Mt 11:28-29*).

In this prayer, we know that we are never alone. The prayer of a pastor embraces both the Spirit who cries out “Abba, Father!” (cf. *Gal 4:6*), and the people who have been entrusted to his care. Our mission and identity can be defined by this dialectic.

The prayer of a pastor is nourished and made incarnate in the heart of God’s People. It bears the marks of the sufferings and joys of his people, whom he silently presents to the Lord to be anointed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the hope of a pastor, who with trust and insistence asks the Lord to care for our weakness as individuals and as a people. Yet we should also realize that it is in the prayer of God’s People that the heart of a pastor takes flesh and finds its proper place. This sets us free from looking for quick, easy, ready-made answers; it allows the Lord to be the one – not our own recipes and goals – to point out a path of hope. Let us not forget that at the most difficult times in the life of the earliest community, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, prayer emerged as the true guiding force.

Brothers, let us indeed acknowledge our weaknesses, but also let Jesus transform them and send us forth anew to the mission. Let us never lose the joy of knowing that we are “the sheep of his flock” and that he is our Lord and Shepherd.

For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not neglect the dialectic that determines our identity. First, our relationship with Jesus. Whenever we turn away from Jesus or neglect our relationship with him, slowly but surely our commitment begins to fade and our lamps lose the oil needed to



light up our lives (cf. *Mt 25:1-13*): “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me... because apart from me you can do nothing” (*Jn 15:4-5*). In this regard, I would encourage you not to neglect spiritual direction. Look for a brother with whom you can speak, reflect, discuss and discern, sharing with complete trust and openness your journey. A wise brother with whom to share the experience of discipleship. Find him, meet with him and enjoy his guidance, accompaniment and counsel. This is an indispensable aid to carrying out your ministry in obedience to the will of the Father (cf. *Heb 10:9*) and letting your heart beat with “the mind that was in Christ Jesus” (*Phil 2:5*). We can profit from the words of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one... One will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls, and does not have another to help!” (4:9-10).

The other essential aspect of this dialectic is our relationship to our people. Foster that relationship and expand it. Do not withdraw from your people, your presbyterates and your communities, much less seek refuge in closed and elitist groups. Ultimately, this stifles and poisons the soul. A minister whose “heart is encouraged” is a minister always on the move. In our “going forth”, we walk “sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle and sometimes behind: in front, in order to guide the community; in the middle, in order to encourage and support, and at the back in order to keep it united, so that no one lags too far behind... There is another reason too: because our people have a “nose” for things. They sniff out, discover, new paths to take; they have the *sensus fidei* (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12)... What could be more beautiful than this?”<sup>[31]</sup> Jesus himself is the model of this evangelizing option that leads us to the heart of our people. How good it is for us to see him in his attention to every person! The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is nothing else but the culmination of that evangelizing style that marked his entire life.

Dear brother priests, the pain of so many victims, the pain of the people of God and our own personal pain, cannot be for naught. Jesus himself has brought this heavy burden to his cross and he now asks us to be renewed in our mission of drawing near to those who suffer, of drawing near without embarrassment to human misery, and indeed to make all these experiences our own, as eucharist.<sup>[32]</sup> Our age, marked by old and new wounds, requires us to be builders of relationships and communion, open, trusting and awaiting in hope the newness that the kingdom of God wishes to bring about even today. For it is a kingdom of forgiven sinners called to bear witness to the Lord’s ever-present compassion. “For his mercy endures forever”.

## PRAISE

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (*Lk 1:46*)

How can we speak about gratitude and encouragement without looking to Mary? She, the woman whose heart was pierced (cf. *Lk 2:35*), teaches us the praise capable of lifting our gaze to the future and restoring hope to the present. Her entire life was contained in her song of praise (cf. *Lk 1:46-55*). We too are called to sing that song as a promise of future fulfillment.

Whenever I visit a Marian shrine, I like to spend time looking at the Blessed Mother and letting her look at me. I pray for a childlike trust, the trust of the poor and simple who know that their mother is there, and that they have a place in her heart. And in looking at her, to hear once more, like the Indian Juan Diego: “My youngest son, what is the matter? Do not let it disturb your heart. Am I not here, I who have the honour to be your mother?”<sup>[33]</sup>

To contemplate Mary is “to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves”.<sup>[34]</sup>

Perhaps at times our gaze can begin to harden, or we can feel that the seductive power of apathy or self-pity is about to take root in our heart. Or our sense of being a living and integral part of God’s People begins to weary us, and we feel tempted to a certain elitism. At those times, let us not be afraid to turn to Mary and to take up her song of praise.

Perhaps at times we can feel tempted to withdraw into ourselves and our own affairs, safe from the dusty paths of daily life. Or regrets, complaints, criticism and sarcasm gain the upper hand and make us lose our desire to keep fighting, hoping and loving. At those times, let us look to Mary so that she can free our gaze of all the “clutter” that prevents us from being attentive and alert, and thus capable of seeing and celebrating Christ alive in the midst of his people. And if we see that we are going astray, or that we are failing in our attempts at conversion, then let us turn to her like a great parish priest from my previous diocese, who was also a poet. He asked her, with something of a smile: “This evening, dear Lady /my promise is sincere; /but just to be sure, don’t forget / to leave the key outside the door”.<sup>[35]</sup> Our Lady “is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice... As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God’s love”.<sup>[36]</sup>

Dear brothers, once more, “I do not cease to give thanks for you” (*Eph* 1:16), for your commitment and your ministry. For I am confident that “God takes away even the hardest stones against which our hopes and expectations crash: death, sin, fear, worldliness. Human history does not end before a tombstone, because today it encounters the “living stone” (cf. *1 Pet* 2:4), the risen Jesus. We, as Church, are built on him, and, even when we grow disheartened and tempted to judge everything in the light of our failures, he comes to make all things new”.<sup>[37]</sup>

May we allow our gratitude to awaken praise and renewed enthusiasm for our ministry of anointing our brothers and sisters with hope. May we be men whose lives bear witness to the compassion and mercy that Jesus alone can bestow on us.

May the Lord Jesus bless you and the Holy Virgin watch over you. And please, I ask you not to

forget to pray for me.

Fraternally,

FRANCIS

Rome, at Saint John Lateran, on 4 August 2019,  
Memorial of the Holy Curé of Ars

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[1] Cf. Apostolic Letter *Anno Iubilari* (23 April 1929): AAS 21 (1929), 312-313.

[2] *Address to the Italian Bishops' Conference* (20 May 2019). Spiritual fatherhood requires a bishop not to leave his priests as orphans; it can be felt not only in his readiness to open his doors to priests, but also to seek them out in order to care for them and to accompany them.

[3] Cf. SAINT JOHN XXIII, *Encyclical Letter Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia on the hundredth anniversary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars* (1 August 1959): AAS (51 (1959), 548.

[4] Cf. *Letter to the People of God* (20 August 2018).

[5] *Meeting with Priests, Religious, Consecrated Persons and Seminarians*, Santiago de Chile (16 January 2018).

[6] Cf. *Letter to the Pilgrim People of God in Chile* (31 May 2018).

[7] *Meeting with the Priests of the Diocese of Rome* (7 March 2019).

[8] *Homily at the Easter Vigil* (19 April 2014).

[9] Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 7.

[10] Cf. JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO, *Las cartas de la tribulación* (Herder, 2019), 21.

[11] Cf. *Address to the Parish Priests of Rome* (6 March 2014).

[12] *Retreat to Priests. First Meditation* (2 June 2016).

[13] A. SPADARO, Interview with Pope Francis, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3918 (19 September 2013), p. 462.

- [14] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137.
- [15] Cf. *Address to the Parish Priests of Rome* (6 March 2014).
- [16] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 268.
- [17] Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 7.
- [18] Cf. Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, 13.
- [19] Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 50.
- [20] *Ibid.*, 134.
- [21] Cf. JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO, *Reflexiones en esperanza* (Vatican City, 2013), p. 14.
- [22] *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Paris, 1974), p. 135; cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83.
- [23] Cf. BARSANUPH OF GAZA, *Letters*, in VITO CUTRO – MICHAŁ TADEUSZ SZWEMIN, *Bisogno di paternità* (Warsaw, 2018), p. 124.
- [24] *L'arte di purificare il cuore*, Rome, 1999, p. 47.
- [25] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2.
- [26] Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 137.
- [27] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.
- [28] *Ibid.*, 3.
- [29] JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO, *Reflexiones en esperanza* (Vatican City, 2013), p. 26.
- [30] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 94.
- [31] *Meeting with Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Members of Pastoral Councils*, Assisi (4 October 2013).
- [32] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 268-270.
- [33] Cf. *Nican Mopohua*, 107, 118, 119.

[34] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 288.

[35] Cf. AMELIO LUIS CALORI, *Aula Fúlgida*, Buenos Aires, 1946.

[36] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 286.

[37] *Homily at the Easter Vigil* (20 April 2019).