

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

This Month's reading:

Saint Joseph Cafasso

Dear Priests of PNG and SI,

Greetings from the LCI! We really hope that this bulletin finds you well and working hard for the glory of God and the salvation of souls!

This bulletin is for you, dear Father. We are convinced that, as Saint Ignatius of Antioch, martyr, says: “The priesthood is the most sublime of all created dignities.” For us, it is enough to know that Jesus Christ has said that we should treat his priests as we would His own person: “*Whoever hears you, hears me. And whoever despises you, despises me. And whoever despises me, despises him who sent me.*” (Lk 10:16)

We know that by the celebration of a single Mass, in which he offers Jesus Christ in sacrifice, a priest gives greater honor to the Lord than if all men by dying for God offered to him the sacrifice of their lives. Saint Alphonsus teaches: “By a single Mass, he gives greater honor to God than all the angels and saints, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, have given or shall give to him; for their worship cannot be of infinite value, like that which the priest celebrating on the altar offers to God.” And so, without any fear, we can repeat the words of an ancient writer that didn't hesitate to affirm that “Jesus has died to institute the priesthood. It was not necessary for

the Redeemer to die in order to save the world; a drop of his blood, a single tear, or prayer, was sufficient to procure salvation for all; for such a prayer, being of infinite value, should be sufficient to save not one but a thousand worlds. But to institute the priesthood, the death of Jesus Christ has been necessary.” “O wonderful dignity of the priests,” cries St. Augustine, “in their hands, as in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, the Son of God becomes incarnate.”

Dear Father, for the next few years, every month you will receive a short bulletin with texts from the Saints or from the Magisterium of the Church about your priesthood and the sublime mysteries that Our Lord put into your hands. We should never forget that God put into our hands the thing that

is the most dear to Him: His Only Son present in the Eucharist and the salvation of souls. There is nothing better we can do than to work hard for the salvation of souls and the worthy celebration of the Sacraments!

The only goal of this bulletin it is to help **you** to realize how great a dignity you have been given and how necessary is for you to become holy, in order to be worthy of such a great ministry. We will be absolutely grateful if you read it and meditate these few pages. We beg you also to elevate a short prayer for us and the apostolate in the LCI.

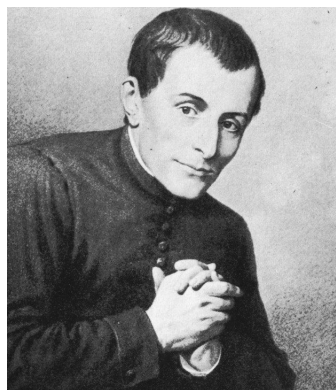
God bless you!

Fr. Tomás Ravaioli, IVE

LCI Director

Author: Saint Joseph Cafasso

St Joseph Cafasso lived in the city of Turin, Italy, in the 19th century, and was known as a model of priestly life. He is famous for his pastoral care of criminals, especially those condemned to death.



He stood by their side as they were led to the execution, bringing them to repentance by showing them the mercy and compassion of God. While working in the ecclesiastical college in the city, which was dedicated to forming diocesan priests, among his students was another future saint, John Bosco, whom he had known from childhood. St Joseph was also known for guiding his flock with kindness and serenity. His fellow citizens had such high regard for this devout priest that they suggested he take a place in the legislative assembly. He refused, however, saying, “In the day of judgment, the Lord will ask me if I was a good priest, not a good deputy.” His legacy can be seen in the deep devotion to the Saint, who died in Turin on June 23, 1860, at the age of 49.

The Nature of the Office of the Priesthood

By Saint Joseph Cafasso

“WHO ART THOU?” This was the question put by the messengers from the Sanhedrin to St. John the Baptist, the Precursor of our Divine Lord. The prophets from all Judea had begun to talk about him, extraordinary things were related about him, and his fame was increasing every day. The chief priests assembled in council said: We must know who this man is; we must see with whom we have to deal. It was for this purpose, as you know, that they sent a delegation to find out. In like manner, but not through others, I myself wish to put the question to you, venerable brethren: Who is this man who in the world is called an ecclesiastic, a priest? Who is this personage whom some bless and others curse? Who is he whom the whole world talks about and criticizes, and who is the subject of discussion by all pens and all tongues? What is the significance of that name which resounds in every corner of the world? It now behooves us more than anyone else to find out and know who this man is.

The Priest as the World Judges Him

Who then is the priest? If I ask the people of the world, some will exalt him to the skies, others will seek to lower his prestige to the dust. Each one defines him according to his outlook. Some regard him as a happy, fortunate man, others look upon him as a useless lazy individual without any occupation. Some say that he is a harsh, obstinate man, insensible to the troubles and needs of his people. Others, on the contrary, say that he is a man devoted to the public good, although misunderstood and ill-treated by the world.

The Priest as Priests Judge Him

I attach no importance to this gossip of those who have neither the competence nor the right to pass judgment on the clergy, but I turn to you, priests, and I ask you what is a priest? From you, at least, I shall receive a just, exact,

complete reply. And do not imagine that it is so easy even for us who have the name and character of priests to give the reply.

What is a Priest?

What is a priest? In order to define clearly what he is, I shall avail myself of the distinctions that St. Bernard made concerning ecclesiastics and shall consider him in his nature, in his person, and in his habits. *Quid in natura, quis in persona, qualis in moribus!* In his nature he is a man like others. In his person, his dignity is above that of all other men in the world. In his conduct and habits, he should be a man totally different from all others as he is by his dignity and office. These are the three points which I propose for your consideration.

Priest, Know Thyself!

“Man, know thyself,” is an ancient maxim inculcated by the pagans; study and investigate yourself until you arrive at knowing yourself! This knowledge alone would suffice to reform the world. All the disorders and scandals of the clergy would disappear immediately if they knew themselves. It is because he lacks this knowledge that the priest becomes neglectful of his duties. Although clothed as a priest and bearing the priestly name and priestly character, he lives the profane life of a man of the world simply because he does not realize who he is. It is because he fails to know himself that he demeans himself and, instead of fleeing from dangers, rashly exposes himself to them and falls. But this is not all; the worst is, that while such a priest is lacking in this



fundamental knowledge, he foolishly thinks that he possesses it and will take no care to acquire it.

Just try the experiment of saying to such a priest that he should be a little more circumspect, that he should not go to such a place, that he should recollect who he is, and you will immediately get the answer from him that he knows his dignity better than you do, that he knows his duties and does not need anyone to tell him. Poor priest! He does not know himself and, what is worse, he is persuaded that he knows himself sufficiently well, and therefore there are no means of making him enter into himself and acquire at least some idea of himself and his exalted dignity.

The priest, on the contrary, who begins to doubt about himself, who fixes his eyes a little on the lofty dignity of that state in which God has placed him, who considers the wickedness of the world in which he lives and its many dangers, will be seen to fix his attention upon himself, to study now one aspect, now another of his needs and of his duties. He will be always happy when he can get enlightenment on his state and his duties either from a friend, or from a book or from a spiritual conference. He never stops or wearies in the pursuit

of that knowledge, for according as he acquires it he perceives the importance and the need of making still further progress. And just as no one neglects the pursuit of that knowledge more than he who is lacking it, so no one is more eager and takes greater care in its pursuit than he who has begun to possess it.

“Priesthood
is the apex
of all things.”
(St. Ignatius Martyr)

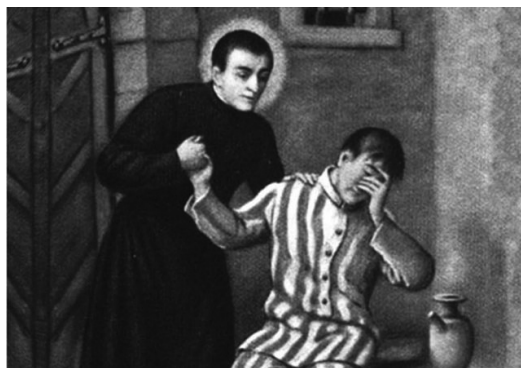
I - THE PRIEST IN HIS NATURE

Who then is a priest considered in his nature? Note that when I say a priest I do not mean someone far away from here, I mean myself and, in like manner, each of you means yourself. The priest is a man like other men. God might have selected that personage, so extraordinary in his destiny, from among His noblest creatures but He did not do so; having actually selected him from among men, He might have endowed him with some external prerogatives. He might have exempted him from some of the common miseries of humanity and thus make him at least singular and, in some respects, naturally eminent among other men; but no, the priest is a man like other men: *“Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God.”* (Heb

5:1) He is born, he lives, he dies like any other. He has need of repose, of food, of comfort, like others, and he is subject to the same miseries of body and soul: now he is sad, now joyful, now he weeps, now he laughs, now he fears, now he hopes. Yes, he is a man and very much so, and the miseries of others are the same as those of the priest. From this fundamental truth which is clear and evident, and which it is not necessary for me to discuss further, each one deduces consequences according to his outlook. The world and evil-minded people deduce their own, those ecclesiastics who do not know themselves or their dignity deduce theirs, and finally good priests deduce consequences for their own betterment.

***Conclusions Drawn
by the Wicked World***

The world and those who do not practice their religion reason thus:



What is a priest and what claims is he making because he wears a particular kind of dress, adopts a certain name, has a certain position? What has he to do with us? He is a man as we are. He has his profession, as we have ours; for me rest, he is a man like others, neither more nor less. Why should I allow myself to be impressed by him; why should I be dictated to by him; live under his directions and even disclose to him me most secret thoughts of my heart, when I know that he is a man me same as myself? Let him follow his trade, I will follow mine. The time is past when the name of priest sounded imperiously in the ears of simpletons. Poor blind people! They do not know what they are saying. Such reasoning results in want of respect for the person of the priest, of docility to his exhortations, and God grant that it does not lead to the loss of faith and religion! I will say no more about the people who reason thus because they are not here, and this retreat is not for them. Let us turn to what concerns ourselves; for it will be truly beneficial for us.

***Conclusions Drawn
by Tepid Priest***

I am a man like others, why wonder then if I fall into certain

miseries common to all men? Note, venerable brethren, that it is a priest who speaks thus, and that the human weaknesses to which he refers are not merely distractions in prayer or impatience, but unseemly conduct that causes one to shudder. I am a man like other men, he says, and why cannot I have a good time, why cannot

I have certain consolations and take part in certain pastimes? If the layman can do so, I have the same right; even though I'm a priest, I have not ceased to be a man like him. Why then all this wondering and gossiping because I frequent a certain house, because I attend a certain party, because I go to a certain place, because I speak and jest like men of the world? How many laymen act in that way, and who reprimands them? Continue therefore, and don't be deterred by gossip! Ah, if there is one here with such sentiments -and indeed there are, alas, such among the clergy- I would like to say to him: "You are more deserving of compassion than of reprimand, you are more an object for pity than for scolding; you belittle your position, because you are

*"The word priest
connotes the most
august person
in the world,
a person truly divine."*

(St. Denis)

ignorant of what it is, and you wish to make your low estimate of it an excuse for your dissipated, worldly life. I will tell you in a few moments that what you say is not true; that you are, on the contrary, a man different from others, and therefore your conduct should be different also." For the present, venerable brethren, let us

give a passing glance at the conclusions which the good and prudent among the clergy will draw to their own advantage.

Conclusions Drawn by Good Priests

We are men like others, therefore we are, like others, liable to make mistakes, to err, to slip, to fall; therefore we must be alen and on our guard. We are men in our speech, in our conversation, in our judgments. We are men even in the exercise of our ministry -at the altar, in the confessional, in the performance of our most sacred duties- therefore we must have vigilance, reserve, gravity, modesty, if we do not wish to have other more baneful proofs that we are

men. Although clad in the livery of the priest, anointed and consecrated with holy chrism, we are however composed of flesh and blood, and our character, however holy and venerable it may be, does not guarantee us against the assaults and snares of our enemy. We are men like others, therefore, we should not be dismayed or disheartened if the Lord permits certain humiliating, obstinate, tenacious temptations. It is no dishonor to the priest to be assaulted, whatever be the assault; it is rather an honor. The wrong will be in yielding or in wavering. We are men, therefore let us learn from ourselves and our human weaknesses how to treat other men, how to handle them with tact and gain them over. The study and knowledge of oneself is a great school for the priest who has to cure the defects of others. We shall be able to find out from the study of ourselves what it is that most attracts men, the force of such attractions and the obstacles that have to be overcome. But if any priest wishes to do good and not merely beat the air, he must first adopt for himself the means that he suggests to others, he must use those weapons that he wishes to put in

“The priest is placed between God and man, beneath God, but above man.”

(Pope Innocent III)

the hands of others in order to be able to measure their force and consequence. He should, for example, ask himself: what effect would this word, this advice, this correction, this threat, this invective have on myself if it were made to me at that time and in that manner? This is a great school in which I can train myself, and if I apply to others the knowledge gained it will seldom fail to produce a good effect, because I am a man just as they are and I can confidently expect that effects produced in myself will be produced in others as well. Finally, we are men and, as such, we are subject to real defects and imperfections, not to mention anything more serious. If therefore anyone eager for our good and anxious for our improvement has the charity to warn us about some defect, instead of getting indignant and thus repaying this act of charity with bad humor -which however is the usual coin with which such friendly warnings are repaid- let us recognize our misery and our weakness, and thank whoever has the goodness to correct us for his charitable act, and let us profit by our faults and humiliations to exercise greater vigilance over

ourselves and our behavior. This is what the priest does habitually who knows, and lives intimately persuaded that he is a man like other men. However great his dignity, exalted his position, high the esteem in which he is held, even if he were to be regarded as a saint, he must always remember that he is a man, and as such he must restrain his senses, moderate his appetite, guard his eyes, avoid places of dissipation, shun dangerous company, make use of the only means that can render him victorious in temptations and dangers -prayer and flight. This is good for him, for it is enough for a priest to forget that he is a man just for a moment to bring some misfortune on himself.

Let us take these reflections to heart, venerable brethren, and whatever be our state, dignity, or the solid virtue that we believe we possess, we are all the time men and, as such, we should always have a low opinion of ourselves, distrust our own strength and walk cautiously, vigilantly, and watchfully.

II - THE PRIEST IN HIS PERSON

Who is the priest in his person? The wicked world that Christ condemned will say that he is a man like other men, but the world does not stop to consider who he is and only seeks to lower him and despise him. I will not delay to discuss

the opinion of the world, for we here all know who the priest is, considered in his person, in his vocation and in his dignity. "The word priest" says Denis the Areopagite, "connotes the most august person in the world, a person truly divine." The great Pontiff, Innocent III, speaking of the priest and of the dignity to which he is raised because of his office, says that he is placed "between God and man, beneath God, but above man." He cannot be called God, but neither can he be called a mere man. He is like a middle person between God and man, but nearer and more closely belonging to God than to man, as the Apostle, St. Paul called Timothy: "*But thou, a man of God.*" (1 Tim 6:11) And here, observes a commentator, it would appear at first sight that St. Paul should have called his disciple by a different name, for -the priesthood having been established on earth for men, "*every high priest is ordained for men*" (Heb 8:3)- he should have rather called him a man for other men, than a man for God; but no, he calls him "*a man of God,*" and with reason, for the ambassador belongs rather to him who sends him than to those to whom he is sent. The priest is indeed ordained for men, but that does not make him one of them or cause him to belong to them. He belongs to Him who sent him and is "*a man of God.*" Just as in the natural

order, observed Hugo of St. Victor, it has pleased God to choose one star from among the others and make it regulate the world by its light and influence, so in the moral order too, He has been pleased to choose a man among others, to raise him up to a sublime dignity and surround him with splendor, in order that he might be the leader and director of all others. St. Ignatius Martyr, speaking of the priesthood, calls it “the apex of all things.” The priest excels all men and is the summit of all things, whether honors, dignities, titles or degrees. I shall not delay here to quote for you the remarkable eulogies on the grandeur and dignity of the priesthood by the two great doctors of the Church, St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom. The passages that I have quoted suffice to give an idea of who the priest is in person and dignity.

***The Priest Should Know
is Own Dignity***

Let us come now to the consideration of how necessary and important it is that the priest should realize fully and in a practical way the greatness of his dignity, because if he does not know it and esteem it, it would be impossible for him to avoid lowering it and degrading it, for he cannot esteem it if he does not know it. We see this exemplified

every day in ordinary, familiar affairs. If a person puts on a precious garment without knowing it has any special value, he will take no care of it, and it will not be long before it is stained and covered with mud. Therefore, St. Ambrose has well said that the first thing a priest should learn is his own sacerdotal dignity in order that he may be able to preserve it. Do you believe, venerable brethren, that so many priests would debase their own greatness with worldly, profane, unseemly actions; would it be possible that so many ecclesiastics should expose their dignity to ridicule and laughter in places of profane amusement and take part in vulgar jokes and games if they had a proper idea of the dignity of their office? To such priests may be fitly applied the words of the Psalmist: “*Man when he was in honour did not understand.*” (48:21) They have studied for the priesthood, they have been ordained priests and they have been performing the duties of a priest for many years, yet they do not know either what they are, or what they are doing, or where they are. In dignity they are raised up to Heaven but they are blind and ignorant, and do not know who they are. They regard themselves as ordinary men, and associate with other men just as a man of the world; in trafficking, in money-making, in amusements, on the streets, in houses

with people of every sort, as if there were not much distinction between the priest and the idler, the vagabond, the worldly or even the irreligious: *“Man when he was in honour did not understand: he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them.”* (Ps 48:21)

Poor ecclesiastics! They make others weep at seeing how they misuse and humiliate the dignity of the priesthood and expose it to ridicule. A day will come when they themselves will lament that they missed their dignity and brought it into contempt, and God grant that it may not happen to them to have to lament it for all eternity!

***The Priest’s Dignity Must Be Upheld
by a Virtuous Life***

But you will ask how can the great dignity of us priests be upheld? Worldly greatness is maintained by the authority to command, by luxurious trappings and by external pomp. Our dignity, however, is maintained by much more precious means; by being equipped with

true and solid virtue. Give me a virtuous priest and I will show you a man who is always truly great, august, venerable, even though he may have no revenue

or titles or important employment.

Even though he may be misunderstood and humiliated by the world, you will always have in him a man who towers over the world and, what is more important, you will have true, honorable greatness enhanced by all its decorum; a greatness that makes itself respected by the good and even

by the bad. No, to be truly great in our profession it is not sufficient to be raised up to exalted positions, to have honorable titles. These things are only miseries which have nothing whatever to do with true greatness in a priest; we must keep our attention fixed on facts, we must be provided with, and consolidated in virtue. “What we are by profession” says St. Ambrose, “we must show by deeds rather than by mere names.” And here we have come to the most important of our considerations, which is to see what a priest is or what he should be in his external actions.



III - THE PRIEST IN HIS HABITS

The ecclesiastic is a man like other men considered in his nature. He is greater than other men if we consider him in his person, and he is different from other men if we look at him in his actions. We shall see the reasons why he should be a different man, what it is that will make him different from others and what will happen when he is not.

The Priest Should Be Different from Others

That a priest should be different from others in his habits, or that he ought to live differently, I shall show by two simple, clear reasons.

(1) By His Vocation

A man ought to adapt himself in his manner of living to his state, to his condition, to his degree; the gentleman lives as a gentleman, the artist as an artist, the citizen as a citizen, and so on; this is the most natural thing in the world. Therefore that an ecclesiastic should live as an ecclesiastic is a legitimate conclusion. In addition, the ecclesiastic by virtue of his vocation has been separated from others, raised up and transformed into a different man; therefore the life of others cannot be

adapted or suitable for him; therefore in his habits he must be a different man and live differently.

(2) The Priest Should Be the Light of the World

A further reason; we priests know that we ought to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the teachers of the people, and that these offices are not just mere titles or empty names, but that they involve real obligations and duties which none of us can neglect. Now give me a priest who in his habits is like other men, whose conduct and life are like those of other men, I ask, where is the light which should illuminate the world, where is that salt that should preserve it from corruption, where are those lessons for others, if a layman is in a position to say with regard to a priest: I have everything and I do everything that the priest has and does, my life is like his, in his actions he is in no way superior to me. What a fine master in Israel such a priest would make if he allows himself to be equalled, if not surpassed, by the layman! Someone might here object and say: even though the priest be not different from other men, he can carry out the duties assigned to him by means of learning and sound doctrine, he can illuminate, preserve, teach. It would appear therefore that

the reasons given why the priest should be different from other men have not great weight. This, brethren, is not so, as I will show you. Whoever has a duty to fulfill is obliged to make use of all the means necessary to fulfill it; he is bound by this consideration, if for no other reason, to apply himself to those means which are most useful and efficacious; and this obligation is undeniable; it follows from what we have said. Now among the means that have weight with the people to obtain the ends that we have mentioned, the example of an edifying, virtuous life is certainly the most powerful. All the knowledge of a priest will be sterile if his sermons and exhortations and advice is not supported and sustained by the force of his example. What I have said therefore stands. A common life like the layman's is not sufficient for a priest who wishes to discharge the duties of his office.

I shall not dwell further on this point, for it is evident. I pass on to consider what things are required to make a priest a man different in habits from other men.

***In Order to Be Different From Others
the Priest Must***

***(1) Abstain from Evil More Than
Others***

Two things are required in our case. There are many vices among men and sin abounds; the priest should not only be free from these but he should keep far away from them. Among men there are also the good and virtuous and these are not few; the priest should endeavor to surpass these in virtue and goodness. Thus ordering his life, he becomes a man different from others, and although the priest without this differentiating quality might become a great man, even if he does, he will be a man like others since he lacks that quality of excellence which consists in living differently from others. This is easily said, but it is not so easy to put it into practice. In order to clarify our ideas on this important point, let us go in spirit round the world to see among the various ways of living that we shall find, what becomes a priest, in order that we may adopt it into our lives. I shall not speak of those who live habitually in sin and who show themselves publicly given to certain vices such as licentiousness, impiety, excesses in eating and drinking; it is evident at once that such a kind of life is not suitable for a priest. Let us examine other failings which do not strike the eye so much, but which nonetheless are reprehensible or at least dangerous. That layman, for example, does not appear to do anything very bad, but yet does nothing good. One day after another is

passed in sleep and laziness and idleness, and the years of his life are spent the same way. That is not right, it is a sin. It does not therefore suit a priest who should be a man different from others. That other man does nothing bad, but he frequents a certain house, is unduly familiar with certain persons, which gives rise to suspicion and gossip. This kind of life gives scandal and is sinful. A priest in these circumstances could not avoid giving rise to a little suspicion although his life and conduct may be innocent and holy. He should regulate his life in a different way, since he is a man different from others. That other person goes to Sunday Mass but he is so distracted, restless, and bored that his presence is certainly not edifying; this is sinful, because it is not sufficient to do something in itself good, it must be done in a fitting manner. An ecclesiastic should behave quite differently from that; his bearing should be distinguished by gravity, modesty, attention, composure, so that just to look at him one would say immediately, that is a man different from others.

We might go on discussing various other faults and failings found among men: this man says that he has pardoned his enemy and harbors no ill feeling, however, he adopts an air of aloofness and haughtiness towards him; if he can avoid saluting him he does so, if he is

forced to salute him, everyone notices that it is done through courtesy and not out of affection. In order not to find himself in that person's company, he invents a thousand pretexts; this is not proper, it gives bad example and causes people to say that there is still bitterness in his heart. Woe to the ecclesiastic who is not on his guard about this point! Very often it comes from pride and self-love. Once the ecclesiastic allows himself to be dominated by such failings, he becomes a man like others, punctilious, obstinate, tenacious.

(2) The Priest Must Practice Virtue More Than Others

In the world there are many good and virtuous people; if the ecclesiastic wishes to keep his position, to preserve his dignity, and show by his conduct that he is the singular person he really is, he must excel, otherwise he puts himself on the same level with others by his conduct. "The ecclesiastic," says St. Gregory the Great, "is wanting in what he owes to his position, not only when he puts himself among the number of those who live badly, but also when he does not excel good and pious laity in living virtuously. His virtue should not be of the common sort, it should be singular." But a good life without grave defect suffices for the laity, why should

it not suffice for an ecclesiastic? Would a work by a grammarian that is considered well done be considered to be equally well done, if the author had been a rhetorician? It would be sufficient for a grammarian to avoid errors and add that little ornament and elegance which are inseparable from the subject, but that would not be sufficient for a rhetorician. The work of each profession has its own standard. The comparison is taken from profane occupations, but it throws light on our subject.

What a great thought this is, my dear Fathers, and how it ought to stimulate us! In the world, there are people who pray much, well, we priests should pray more. There are others who frequent the Sacraments and gain great fruit from doing so: we should surpass them. There are people who, when offended, humiliated, blamed, show no resentment; they suffer in silence, they pardon; but the priest should go still further, he should pray for his enemies, he should do good to them as far as it is in his power. There are people with such delicate consciences that they not only abstain

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from committing all mortal sins, but they would not deliberately commit a venial sin for all that is in the world. The ecclesiastic should not be inferior to them. On the contrary, he should try to surpass them since otherwise the disciple would be seen to be above the master, which cannot and ought not

to be, for Our Lord says: *"The disciple is not above the master."* (Mt 10:24)

Therefore the ecclesiastic should look around him from time to time and see whether anyone is trying to surpass him, or has surpassed him, and if he finds that he has, he should not allow that supremacy to stand. If in the house in which I live, there is a virtue, I also should have that

virtue and in a higher degree. If in that position in which I happen to be, in that countryside, in that town, in my neighborhood, I perceive people who are making progress in virtue, who from day to day go on increasing in humility, mortification, patience, detachment from the world, I should regard it as a challenge to me to take part in the race, and to look to it that I shall always be first, because that is my place. Otherwise, I, a priest,

would cease to be that man, distinct and different, that I am, and in which state I have the right and duty to keep myself.

But perhaps some of you may think that I am going too far; that I want to transform a man into an angel, and that a priest should be sinless. My dear brothers in Christ, there is no question of destroying the nature of man in the priest. It has been made clear at the very beginning that the priest is a man, but it is claimed, and the claim is fully justified, that he should be a man different from others in his habits since he is different and distinct in his dignity.

If other men's defects are many and notable, those of the priest should be few and light. If other men commit them, with full advertence, in the case of the priest, they should be the result of surprise more than of will; and if unfortunately he happens to fall, he should make sure to surpass other sinners in his amendment. Instead of remaining in sin he should rise more promptly than others, have a more noble repentance, a more intense and profound horror for

sin, and should learn from that fall to walk more cautiously for the future, and to put more zeal into the service of God.

I say that the priest should always and in every case be superior to any of the laity. And this is not an exaggeration on my part; it is a consequence that follows necessarily from the consideration of what the priest is, and is the common opinion of the Fathers of the Church. St. Ambrose says: "God requires that there be nothing plebeian, nothing characteristic of the common herd in the priest; that in his pursuits, manners and customs there should be nothing in common with the disorderly multitude." Origen applies to the priest the test given by Jeremias: "*I sat not in the assembly of jesters I sat alone.*" (15:17), and he adds: "When our life is such that no one is equal to us, then we can say: '*I sat alone*', as the Prophet Jeremias has said."

And the Council of Trent repeated the same thing clearly in these words: "Clerics should surpass laymen in conduct as they do in office."



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