

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

The Priest, a Man Clothed with all the Powers of God

By Robert Cardinal Sarah

[Homily during the Mass marking his 50th anniversary of priestly ordination]

We are here in St. Peter's Basilica to celebrate the Eucharist, that is, to give thanks to the Lord on the occasion of my fiftieth anniversary of priestly Ordination and the fortieth anniversary of the Episcopate. The heart of this celebration is Jesus

Christ, the Heavenly High Priest ... “holy, innocent, without blemish, separated from sinners and raised above the heavens” (Heb 7:26). But also the Virgin Mary, our Most Holy Mother, finds herself among us and invokes upon us the outpouring of the Spirit of Love, of Truth and Holiness.

Before having the joy and the privilege of offering you a brief

meditation on the priesthood, starting from the biblical texts we have heard, let me first of all thank you, each and every one, from the bottom of my heart, as you have gathered here to surround me with your affection, your prayer and the strength of your Faith: I really need your Faith, the support of your friendship and your Christian fervor, to help me raise my gratitude to the Lord on this blessed day.

In fact, alone, I am too inadequate, too covered with miseries and sins. Alone, I am a no one who dares to

present myself before God and express my immense gratitude for having called me to the priesthood and for the countless wonders that he has worked in me, in the course of my whole life. God amazes with his choices. He is wonderful and surprising in his generosity and in his love for each of us. This fiftieth is actually the anniversary of us all. Listen to what he says to each of us today: "Before forming you in the womb, I knew you, before you came out into the light, I consecrated you; I have made you a prophet of the nations"(Jer 1: 5).

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Cardinal Robert Sarah was born on 15 June 1945 in Ourous, Guinea. He was ordained priest on 20 July 1969.

On 13 August 1979, he was appointed Archbishop of Conakry at the age of 34, making him the youngest bishop in the world and called "the baby bishop" by John Paul II. He was consecrated on 8 December 1979.

On 1 October 2001, he was appointed secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.



On 7 October 2010, Pope Benedict XVI appointed him president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum".

On 23 November 2014 he was nominated Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Created and proclaimed Cardinal by Benedict XVI in the consistory of 20 November 2010.

Member of: Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples; Congregation for the Causes of Saints; and the Pontifical Committee for the International Eucharistic Congresses.



Here is what the Lord has been for me: I was born in a humble and poor environment like that of Nazareth and in an animist and pagan culture, and He made me a Christian, a priest and a Bishop. Through baptism and priestly ordination he transformed me from nothing into his humble servant, into his beloved son. What I have become is truly the work of God and the fruit of the enormous sacrifices and heroic renunciations of Spiritan missionaries.

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What I have become I also owe to my parents: Alexandre and Marie Claire. The priest – here is the most magnificent work, the most generous gift that God has given to humanity – is the most precious and inconceivable treasure that exists on earth: the Curé of Ars, Saint John-Mary Vianney was deeply convinced of it.

He said: “If we had faith, we would see God hidden in the priest like a light behind the glass, like wine mixed with water.

How great is the priest! If he really understood (this), he would die. ... God obeys him: he says two words and Our Lord descends from heaven at hearing this voice and closes himself in a small host." The priest is "a man who stands in the place of God, a man who is clothed with all the powers of God. Look at the power of the priest! His tongue makes God of a piece of bread!"

However, this happens only if we priests agree to be crucified with Christ, if each of us is ready to say, like Saint Paul, in the concrete web of our existence: "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (cf. Gal 2.19-20). Christ, the Son of God, only through the Cross and at the end of an extraordinary descent into an abyss of humiliation, comes to confer on priests the divine power to celebrate the Eucharist and to tear men, his earthly brothers, from the slavery of sin and death, to make them partakers of his divinity.

The Eucharist takes place only if our life is marked by the Cross.

According to St. Josemaría Escrivà, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the vital motivation of the priest, the pillar on which his priestly existence is built. In his motto he wrote it this way: "in laetitia nulla dies sine cruce: in joy, no day without the Cross".

The priest lives joy in its fullness in the Holy Mass, which is the *raison d'être* of his existence, what gives meaning to his life.

During the Mass, on the paten and in the chalice, the priest is close to the Host, he is truly before and together with our Lord Jesus Christ: Jesus looks at him and

he looks at Jesus. Are we really fully aware of what the real presence of Christ himself really means before our eyes, under the Eucharistic species? During daily Mass the priest comes face to face with Jesus Christ and at that precise moment, he is identified, he becomes identified with Christ, becoming not only an *Alter Christus*, another Christ, but he is really *Ipse Christus*, Christ Himself. He is conscious of being

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invested by the Person of Christ himself, configured in a specific sacramental identification with the High Priest of the eternal Covenant (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* n.29).

St. Josemaria says again: “All priests – whether we are sinners or saints – when they celebrate Holy Mass are no longer themselves. They are Christ who renews his divine Calvary Sacrifice on the Altar.” In fact, on the altar I do not preside over anything, not even this Eucharist that gathers us here today. Although unworthily, Jesus is truly in me, I am Christ: what a terrifying statement! What a fearful responsibility! It makes me tremble with terror, but it is true: I am at the altar in His name and in His stead. It is in persona Christi that I consecrate the bread and wine, after having given him my body, my voice, my poor heart, profaned so many times by my many sins and that I ask him to purify.

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On the eve of every Eucharistic celebration, the Virgin Mary, who welcomes us as children in her arms, prepares us herself and urges us to consign ourselves, soul and body, to Jesus Christ so that the miracle of the Eucharist may be fulfilled. The Cross, the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary shape, structure, nourish and consolidate our Christian and priestly life. You will understand why all Christians, but especially priests, must build their inner life on these three realities: CRUX – HOSTIA and VIRGO; Cross, Eucharist and Virgin Mary. The Cross makes us born into divine life. Without the Eucharist we cannot live and the Virgin watches over our spiritual development as a mother and educates us to grow in faith. Jesus reveals to us the secret of this heavenly food, in which His very flesh that nourishes us allows us to live in his own life, in the unheard-of intimacy of friendship



with him. Priests and faithful Christians are truly Jesus' friends.

The term "friend" introduces us to today's Gospel. Jesus addresses these wonderful words to us: "You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants ... but I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15,14-15). Of course, we often have the feeling of being useless servants (cf. Lk 17:10), an absolute and incontestable truth, but the Lord calls us his friends, he

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makes us his friends, he generously offers us his friendship.

Note that the Lord defines friendship by emphasizing two essential aspects. First of all He teaches us that among friends there are no secrets, friends say it all, with the utmost confidence and transparency.

Precisely because we are his friends, the Lord told us priests what He learned from his Father. He then explains to us that friends trust each other blindly: Jesus therefore has complete trust in us and for this reason offers us a perfect knowledge

of Himself and his Father, reveals his face and his heart to us, shows us his tenderness and his passionate love that will reach the folly of the cross.

He trusts us completely, giving us the power to speak on his name and in his place: for this we can say: "This is my Body ... This is my Blood. Take it and eat it all ... Take it and drink it all ...". He entrusts in our hands his body, his Church, the unfathomable mystery of the One and Triune God, the God who so loved the world that he gave his

only-begotten Son as a ransom for many (Cf. Jn 3, 16; Mk 10:45).

If God has loved and chosen us, are we able to understand all the consequences that derive from being his friends and therefore introduced into his intimacy? Do we understand

that if he has loved us and chosen us as priests, it is to go and bear much fruit? The Love, Friendship and Faith received from God must be revealed to others: we have received the faith to pass it on to others. We are priests to be humbly at the service of God and our brothers and sisters up to the oblation of our lives.

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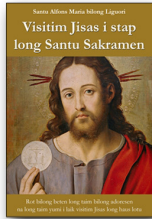
Dear Brothers and Sisters, pray for priests, pray for me, because today the priesthood is going through a deep crisis. In this Eucharist we entrust the Church

and all priests to the maternal goodness of the Virgin Mary, our Mother and Mother of the Church. Once again, thank you very much for being present at this Mass of thanksgiving and God bless you. Amen.

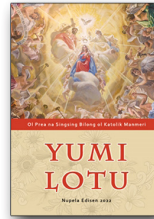




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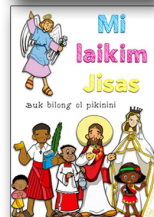
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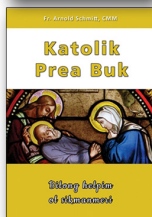
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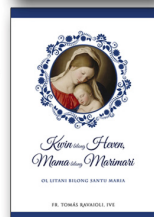
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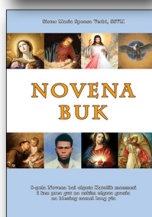
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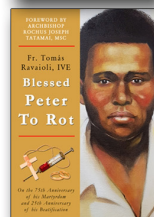
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