

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

Renewal of the Priesthood

By Saint John of Avila

[From the book *Treatise on the Priesthood*]

The Call to Renewal

Oh, what a great thing it would be not to go any further and not to flee the beauty of this holy mountain, but to remain here to consider the great esteem these men had for the sacred honor of the priesthood! Some had such reverence that, as we have said,

they did not dare to take it on. Others took it on through pure obedience to God and with sufficient signs from Him that He was commanding it. As men called by Him and at the disposition of His mercy, they handled His holy body and blood with great fear and trembling, with an abundance of tears and contrition, and with ardent love. They held the time of Mass in such high regard that they ordered their whole lives to acquiring

the purity and true sanctity needed to be there, as they should. Even if they were rich in sanctity, they considered themselves lacking, for they saw the truth that no sanctity, however great, exceeds or equals the high dignity of the priesthood.

But alas! We are compelled to take our eyes from those who thus revered this holy office and lower them to look at others, the sight of whom gives pain as much as the other sight gave consolation. It is like descending from heaven to hell.

Jeremiah asked for a fountain of tears so that he could weep day and

night for the dead of his city. Such a fountain could be put to good use here, and with even greater reason (Jer 9:1). For he mourned the death of the body which may have been ordered to the salvation of the soul. But those now living are dead in soul, and the reason for this is yet more sorrowful: They have despised God and mistreated Him in His own divine person. This is what we do and are if we are bad priests. We treat the Lord at the altar in such a way that no sorrow in itself is sufficient to match such a great sin, committed in such a holy time, work, and place.

Author: Saint John of Avila

He was born in January 1499. After John's parents died and left him as their sole heir to a considerable fortune, he distributed his money to the poor. In 1527, he traveled to Seville, hoping to become a missionary in Mexico. The archbishop of that city persuaded him to stay and spread the faith in Andalusia. During nine years of work there, he developed a reputation as an engaging preacher, a perceptive spiritual director, and a wise confessor.



Because John was not afraid to denounce vice in high places, he was investigated by the Inquisition but was cleared in 1533.

He was friends with Saints Francis Borgia, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, John of the Cross, Peter of Alcantara, and Teresa of Avila. John's mystical writings have been translated into several languages.

He was beatified in 1894, canonized in 1970, and declared a doctor of the Church on October 7, 2012. St. John of Avila's liturgical feast is celebrated on May 10.

May You be forever blessed! Your immense goodness compelled You to descend from heaven to earth. After You announced the way of heaven with many labors and did many favors, this same goodness of Yours that brought You from heaven, compelled You to mount the cross. There, having suffered great torments, You lost Your life, so that, by Your dying, we would regain the life that we had lost through the sin of Adam (cf Rm 5:17) and by our own sins. Seeing the great signs of love that You showed exteriorly, we would know the great fire of love for us that was burning within Your heart. Being loved, we would love You; distrusting the distrust that our sins cause us, we would trust in the mercy of the one who thus handed Himself over for our healing. You knew, Lord, the hardness of our hearts and how soon they forget the favors already received. Therefore, You magnified Your unbounded love and wonderfully ordained how, even though You went to heaven, You would be here with us.

The priest, in consecrating and in wearing the sacred vestments, represents the Lord in His Passion and death. He also represents Him in the meekness with which He suffered and in His obedience even to death on the cross, in the purity of His chastity and in the depth of His humility.

You did this by giving power to priests so that they might call You with the words of consecration, and You Yourself would come in person into their hands and be there really present. Thus, we are participants in the good things You gained by Your Passion, and we remember it with profound gratitude and consolation, loving and obeying the one that did such

a great work, which was to give His life for us.

The Priest as a Sign of Christ

This was the Lord's intention, and the Mass is a representation of his sacred Passion in this way. The priest, in consecrating and in wearing the sacred vestments, represents the Lord in His Passion and death. He also represents Him in the meekness with which He suffered and in His obedience even to death on the cross, in the purity of His chastity and in the depth of His humility. He represents Him in the fire of the love which would make the

priest intercede for all with the deepest sighs and offer himself to suffering and death for their healing, if the Lord should want to accept him. Finally, he has to be such a true representation that the priest is transformed into Christ, and, as St. Dionysius puts it, becomes in one likeness. Being so conformed, there are not two, but what St. Paul says is fulfilled: "*Whoever clings to God, is one spirit with Him.*" (1 Cor 6:17) This is the representation of the sacred Passion that takes place in the Mass. This is what it means for the priest to have his arms extended in the form of a cross and to raise and lower them. It is the meaning of the vestments and everything else. With such a representation as this, the Eternal Father is very pleased, and the Son of God is well treated and served.

To Crucify Christ Again?

But alas, what sorrow! The representation has been turned into the contrary. For the bad priest does not represent Christ our Lord, except in words and in exterior things; but in his customs and behavior, he represents those who caused Christ's death and bitter passion. The first representation is something pleasing; the second is very lamentable. Oh Eternal King, You fulfilled the painful obedience of

Your laborious life and death on the cross that the Father placed as our remedy. You rose in a glorious body and ascended to heaven in glorious triumph over death and sin. You are seated at the right hand of the Father and are revered, praised, and loved by the angels and saints who are in heaven. Who would think that there remained to You, Lord, anything upon the earth, in which Your very divine Person would be despised and treated as You were in Your Passion?

On Holy Thursday night, when the Lord was dining with His disciples, and Judas was with them, the Lord said of one of them, "*Behold, the hand of him who betrays Me is with Me on the table.*" (Lk 22:21) According to Bede, the Lord says the same to the angels when He is on the altar in the hands of a bad priest. If the other Judas gave him a kiss pretending a false peace, the same is not lacking here. How bad the taste and how bitter the kisses which the bad priest gives You at the altar! Is it not right that You say to him what You said to the other: "*Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?*" (Lk 22:48) The kiss is a sign of peace and of interior love, that hearts are joined together and that the will is one. Why, bad priest, do you give a kiss of peace exteriorly, while interiorly you are so lacking in conformity with the will of

Christ? To satisfy your passions, you wage cruel war against Him and make yourself one of those, and even worse than them *“who speak peace with their neighbor, but evils are in their hearts.”* (Ps 27:3). Oh what a distance and what a difference there is between the defilement of such a mouth and the purity which is needed to give the kiss of peace to the most pure Lord, the lover and author of purity itself. Alas, what sorrow! With the same lips that once and many times have united with and kissed a wicked woman, with those same lips, the Son of God is sacrilegiously kissed. Thus, He is, as Bede said, handed over, not to the executioners, as Judas did, but to filthy and sinful members.

The Sense of Sin

What does darkness have to do with light and Belial with Christ? “What do you have to do with women - says St. Jerome - you who converse at the altar with Christ?” If someone had the eyes of an eagle so that he could see clearly the purity of Christ and the

ugliness of indecent lust, I believe the man would fall dead from sorrow and fright at the sight of a dishonorable man daring to touch, kiss, and receive Christ, the source of all purity. In the Passion, His enemies looked at Him with terrible eyes; here He is looked at with indecent eyes, overfed to the point where they could not be more

The bad priest does not represent Christ our Lord, except in words and in exterior things; but in his customs and behavior, he represents those who caused Christ’s death and bitter passion.

indecent in looking at what they ought not. Why should one who has embraced a mistress be joined with Christ in an embrace, more distasteful to Him than when His arms were bound and He was tied to the pillar and beaten in the house of Pilate? What will Christ say of the hands with which the

bad priest touches Him? As we have said, the Lord commanded in the Law that the priest who had touched a dead bird or animal could not go to the altar to touch the sacrifices that were nothing but other animals.

These are hands bloodstained with evil works, hands that have touched unclean things that You, Lord, know. They are hands suitable for striking the Lord and touching Him unworthily. They wound Him more and cause

more sorrow to His soul, if He were able to suffer, than the blows of the executioner caused to His most holy face. Concerning this, St. Bernard is filled with fear saying, "They dare to touch the sacred flesh of the immaculate lamb and to dip into the blood of the Savior the wicked hands which a short time before - alas! - touched the flesh of prostitutes." The same saint says that there were many such priests. It would be right if, aware of their unworthiness, they would wash it away with tears at the altar. But there is nothing of this. Rather, with bold temerity, they proceed forth, even to the point of opening their mouths to receive the Lord.

Sin in the Priest

Oh, Eternal King! What do You feel, what do You say, what do You think when You see over You a mouth which is defiled, dark, and bloodied, opened to consume you, as a wolf swallows a lamb? But are we not asking Him something, which He foresaw many years before He became man? He spoke then and complained about what is happening now: "*They have opened their mouths against Me, as a lion ravening and roaring.*" (Ps 21:14) The mouth of the bad priest is a more terrible lion for the soul of the Son

of God than those angry priests and cruel executioners were for His sacred body, when they opened their mouths wanting to tear Him to pieces.

The Lord suffers and is silent like a gentle lamb. This is because He came not to judge the world but to do penance for our sins. When He was insulted and called a Samaritan and possessed, He did not avenge Himself, but responded, "*I do not seek My honor, but there is one who seeks it and judges.*" (Jn 8:50) Thus, even if He sees Himself consumed by so unworthy a mouth, He suffers and is silent. He remits the case to His Father, complaining of this Judas as He complained of the other, saying, "*God, be not silent, for the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful is opened against Me.*" (Ps 108:2). The more Christ is silent, the louder, "*as a woman in labor*" (Is 42:14), will His Father speak, severely punishing such a sinner who opened his mouth to consume His Only Begotten Son. A mouth defiled by lust and gluttony, a tongue which has dealt with lies, boasting, angry and indecent words, and has bitten and eaten the flesh of its neighbors, by speaking evil of them and ruining their reputations! Concerning such, Scripture says that there are people who have their teeth as arms and a sharp arrow and that their tongue is a sharp knife and an arrow

which wounds (cf. Ps 56:5). With those teeth and that tongue, the bad priest flays and chews his neighbor to pieces. His mouth is then left stained with the blood of his neighbor that he has drunk, like a dog in a butcher's shop that drinks the blood of the animals slaughtered there. With his mouth stained with the blood of his neighbor, an adopted child of God, the Father of the one whose blood he has in his mouth, he goes to the altar to receive Jesus Christ.

Oh what a disgusting thing for a Father who loves His children so much! But, in the end, a bad priest makes Him suffer this hard thing. Taking Christ in his mouth, he places Him in a breast which causes Him more grief than the very cross upon which He was placed. There Christ hung, as St. Augustine says, by His own will and with much joy, because through that rough bed, our souls would be cleansed from our sins, and He would remain in them, pure within the pure. But now He is placed within a breast that is not much different from hell, for the presence of sins is the principal characteristic of hell. Christ cannot be without great sorrow - if He were able to suffer now - at seeing His labors lost - His blood poured out in vain for that priest.

Loss of the Fear of God

The bad priest, having consecrated Christ and received Him, not in a new tomb, but in the pit where infernal swine wallow, finishes his Mass, said very quickly, and goes off to his affairs. He returns to his sins, without respect, fear, or shame for the betrayal of the Lord. His shamelessness is like that of Judas. Neither respect for the presence of the Lord nor the loyalty owed to those who eat together at the same table, nor the threats or gentle words of the Lord, moved him to repentance and consciousness of his sin. Receiving Him in his breast like the other apostles, did not move him either. None of these things prevented him from leaving the presence of the Lord to put into effect the wickedness of his heart.

Such shamelessness, says St. Bernard, in speaking of the same subject, is a grave thing. Because when man becomes hardened and is not afraid, and neither fears nor trembles, then the situation is already desperate. "Whoever is conscious of these things himself is to all, just as he who does justice is not afraid to present himself to the Divine Face; just as the servant enters and exits, greets the Teacher, bends the knee, kisses with a sacrilegious kiss, even acts slyly

before God, in such a way that his iniquity unto hatred is discovered: he is clearly hateful to God, his temerity is scandalous, and his shamelessness is to be cursed.” They have lost the fear of God and shame before men, and therefore their misery is greater and the remedy more difficult. As Saint Chrysostom says, “If lay people sin, they are easily corrected, but if clerics commit sin, they prove to be incapable of correction.”

It is a sad thing that a sinner and a villain, upon hearing a sermon, tremble at a threat from God. They have some reverence for the temple of God, the altar, and the things of God. But the priest has lost fear, with much contact. He does not have love nor does he know what it is. What is left, before he is like

Judas in life and death? He is very displeasing in the eyes of God, and his blindness is profound. Thus, it seems to him that even if he has committed a sin of the flesh the night before, he can, without sorrow or purpose of a new life or leaving the occasions of sin, be reconciled. Alas! Many have their prostitute in their house and then return to her. With this confession and absolution received from another who is under the same condemnation, he dares to return to the altar and to mistreat the Son of God. What will become of these men? *“Vengeance belongs to me, and I will repay, says the Lord.”* (Rom 12:19) With what judgment He then declares it, saying, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”* (Heb 10:28-31)



Liturgical Catechetical Institute
Goroka

If you want a PDF of this monthly bulletin, just let us know!

Send us an e-mail to: lci.pngsi.director@gmail.com

Or a Whatsapp message to: +675 73456479

Or visit our website: www.lci-goroka.com