

# *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

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## *The Dreadful State of the Lukewarm Soul*

**By Saint John Vianney**

[From the book *The Sermons of the Curé of Ars*]

In speaking to you today, my dear brethren, of the dreadful state of the lukewarm soul, my purpose is not to paint for you a terrifying and despairing picture of the soul which is living in mortal sin without even having the wish to escape from this condition. That poor unfortunate creature can but look forward to

the wrath of God in the next life. Alas! These sinners hear me; they know well of whom I am speaking at this very moment... We will go no further, for all that I would wish to say would serve only to harden them more.

Poor blind creature, who gives one hand to God and the other to the world, so that he can call both to his aid, and promise his heart to each in turn! He loves God, or rather,

he would like to love Him, but he would also like to please the world. Then, weary of wanting to give his allegiance to both, he ends by giving it to the world alone. This is an extraordinary life and one which offers so strange a spectacle that it is hard to persuade oneself that it could be the life of one and the same person. I am going to show you this so clearly that perhaps many among you will be hurt by it. But that will matter little to me, for I am always going to tell you what I ought to tell you, and then you will do what you wish about it.

I would say further, my brethren, that whoever wants to please both the world and God leads one of the most unhappy of lives. You shall see how. Here is someone who gives himself up to the pleasures of the world or develops some evil habit.

### **The State of the Lukewarm Soul**

I think, brethren, that you would like to know what is the state of the lukewarm soul. Well, this is it. A lukewarm soul is not yet quite dead in the eyes of God because the faith, the hope, and the charity which are

### **Author: Saint John Vianney**

St. John Vianney, also called Curé d'Ars, (born May 8, 1786, Dardilly, France - died August 4, 1859, Ars), French priest who was renowned as a confessor and for his supernatural powers. He is the patron saint of parish priests.

He was ordained in 1815 and was made assistant priest at Écully, France. In 1818 he became priest of the small village of Ars, which he made a model parish and from which reports of his holiness and his supernatural powers soon spread. He was known for his devotion to the Virgin Mary and to St. Philomena and was dedicated to the sacrament of reconciliation (confession)



for his parishioners. From 1824 he suffered attacks that he believed were caused by the Devil, who allegedly on one occasion set fire to Vianney's bed. By 1827 Ars had become a pilgrimage site, and, every year from 1845 until Vianney's death, about 20,000 persons visited Ars to see Vianney and especially to make their confession to him. The holy curé spent as many as 12 or 15 hours daily in his confessional. He was canonized by Pope Pius XI.

its spiritual life are not altogether extinct. But it is a faith without zeal, a hope without resolution, a charity without ardour.

Nothing touches this soul: it hears the word of God, yes, that is true; but often it just bores it. Its possessor hears it with difficulty, more or less by habit, like someone who thinks that he knows enough about it and does enough of what he should.

Any prayers which are a bit long are distasteful to him. This soul is so full of whatever it has just been doing or what it is going to do next, its boredom is so great, that this poor unfortunate thing is almost in agony. It is still alive, but it is not capable of doing anything to gain Heaven.

For the last twenty years this soul has been filled with good intentions without doing anything at all to correct its habits.

It is like someone who is envious of anyone who is on top of the world

but who would not deign to lift a foot to try to get there himself. It would not, however, wish to renounce eternal blessings for those of the world. Yet it does not wish either to leave the world or to go to Heaven, and if it can just manage to pass its time without crosses or difficulties, it would never ask to leave this

world at all. If you hear someone with such a soul say that life is long and pretty miserable, that is only when everything is not going in accordance with his desires. If God, in order to force such a soul to detach itself from temporal things, sends it any cross or suffering, it is fretful and grieving and abandons itself to grumbles and complaints and often even to a kind of despair. It seems as if it does not want

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to see that God has sent it these trials for its good, to detach it from this world and to draw it towards Himself. What has it done to deserve these trials? In this state a person

thinks in his own mind that there are many others more blameworthy than himself who have not to submit to such trials.

In prosperous times the lukewarm soul does not go so far as to forget God, but neither does it forget itself.

It knows very well how to boast about all the means it has employed to achieve its prosperity. It is quite convinced that many others would not have achieved the same success. It loves to repeat that and to hear it repeated, and every time it hears it, it is with fresh pleasure. The individual with the lukewarm soul assumes a gracious

air when associating with those who flatter him. But towards those who have not paid him the respect which he believes he has deserved or who have not been grateful for his kindnesses, he maintains an air of frigid indifference and seems to indicate to them that they are ungrateful creatures who do not deserve to receive the good which he has done them.

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If I wanted to paint you an exact picture, my brethren, of the state of a soul which lives in tepidity, I should tell you that it is like a tortoise or a snail. It moves only by dragging itself along the ground, and one can see it getting from place to place with great

difficulty. The love of God, which it feels deep down in itself, is like a tiny spark of fire hidden under a heap of ashes.

The lukewarm soul comes to the point of being completely indifferent to its own loss. It has nothing left but a love without tenderness, without action, and without energy which sustains it with difficulty in all that is essential for

salvation. But for all other means of grace, it looks upon them as nothing or almost nothing. Alas, my brethren, this poor soul in its tepidity is like someone between two bouts of sleep. It would like to act, but its will has become so softened that it lacks either the force or the courage to accomplish its wishes.

It is true that a Christian who lives in tepidity still regularly - in appearance

at least - fulfils his duties. He will indeed get down on his knees every morning to say his prayers. He will go to the Sacraments. But in all of this there will be such a distaste, so much slackness and so much indifference, so little preparation, so little change in his way of life, that it is easy to see that he is only fulfilling his duties from habit and routine... because this is a feast and he is in the habit of carrying them out at such a time. His Confessions and his Communions are not sacrilegious, if you like, but they are Confessions and Communions which bear no fruit - which, far from making him more perfect and more pleasing to God, only make him more unworthy. As for his prayers, God alone knows what - without, of course, any preparation - he makes of these.

In the morning it is not God who occupies his thoughts, nor the salvation of his poor soul; he is quite taken up with thoughts of work. His mind is so wrapped up in the things

of earth that the thought of God has no place in it. He is thinking about what he is going to be doing during the day, in what way he will expedite his own work. To say his prayers, he gets down on his knees, undoubtedly, but he does not know what he wants to ask God, nor what he needs, nor even before whom he is kneeling.

For no reason at all he will abandon his prayers, partly at least, thinking that he will finish them in another moment. Does he want to offer his day to God, to say his grace? He does all that, but often without thinking of the one who is addressed.

A lukewarm soul will go to Confession regularly, and even quite frequently. But what kind of Confessions are they? No preparation, no desire to correct

faults, or, at the least, a desire so feeble and so small that the slightest difficulty will put a stop to it altogether. The Confessions of such a person are merely repetitions of old ones, which would be a happy

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state of affairs indeed if there were nothing to add to them. Twenty years ago he was accusing himself of the same things he confesses today, and if he goes to Confession for the next twenty years, he will say the same things. A lukewarm soul will not, if you like, commit the big sins. But some slander or back-biting, a lie, a feeling of hatred, of dislike, of jealousy, a slight touch of deceit or double-dealing - these count for nothing with it.

A lukewarm Christian thinks very little upon the state of his poor soul and almost never lets his mind run over the past. If the thought of making any effort to be better crosses his mind at all, he believes that once he has confessed his sins, he ought to be perfectly happy and at peace. He assists at Holy Mass very much as he would at any ordinary activity. He does not think at all seriously of what he is doing and finds no trouble in chatting about all sorts of things while on the way there. Possibly he will not give a single thought to the fact that he is about to participate in the greatest of all the gifts that God, all-powerful as He is, could give us. He does give some thought to the needs of his own soul, yes, but a very small and feeble amount of thought indeed. Frequently he

will even present himself before the presence of God without having any idea of what he is going to ask of Him. He has few scruples in cutting out, on the least pretext, the prayers before Mass. During the course of the service, he does not want to go to sleep, of course, and he is even afraid that someone might see him, but he does not do himself any violence all the same. He does not want, of course, to have distractions during prayer or during the Holy Mass, yet when he should put up some little fight against them, he suffers them very patiently, considering the fact that he does not like them. Fast days are reduced to practically nothing, either by advancing the time of the main meal or, under the pretext that Heaven was never taken by famine, by making the collation so abundant that it amounts to a full meal. When he performs good or beneficial actions, his intentions are often very mixed - sometimes it is to please someone, sometimes it is out of compassion, and sometimes it is just to please the world. With such people everything that is not a really serious sin is good enough. They like doing good, being faithful, but they wish that it did not cost them anything or, at least, that it cost very little. They would like to visit the sick, indeed, but it would be

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more convenient if the sick would come to them. They have something to give away in alms, they know quite well that a certain person has need of help, but they wait until she comes to ask them instead of anticipating her, which would make the kindness so very much more meritorious. We will even say, my brethren, that the person who leads a lukewarm life does not fail to do plenty of good works, to frequent the Sacraments, to assist regularly at all church services, but in all of this one sees only a weak, languishing faith, hope which the slightest trial will upset, a love of God and of neighbour which is without warmth or pleasure. Everything that such a person does is not entirely lost, but it is very nearly so.

See, before God, my brethren, on what side you are. On the side of the sinners, who have abandoned

everything and plunge themselves into sin without remorse? On the side of the just souls, who seek but God alone? Or are you of the number of these slack, tepid, and indifferent souls such as we have just been depicting for you? Down which road are you travelling?

Who can dare assure himself that he is neither a great sinner nor a tepid soul but that he is one of the elect? Alas, my brethren, how many seem to be good Christians in the eyes of the world who are really tepid souls in the eyes of God, Who knows our inmost hearts...

Let us ask God with all our hearts, if we are in this state, to give us the grace to get out of it, so that we may take the route that all the saints have taken and arrive at the happiness that they are enjoying. That is what I desire for you.