

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

Leading by Example

By Pope Benedict XVI

[From the Book *The Priest, A Bridge to God*]

Humility comes first

I would say, then, that firstly, what is necessary for all of us is to recognize our own limitations, to humbly recognize that we have to leave most things to the Lord. Today, we heard in the Gospel the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Mt 24:42-51). This servant, the Lord tells us, gives food to the others at the proper time. He does not do everything at

once but is a wise and prudent servant who knows what needs to be done in a specific situation. He does so humbly, and is also sure of his master’s trust. So it is that we must likewise do our utmost to be wise and prudent and to trust in the goodness of our “Master,” the Lord, for in the end it is he himself who must take the helm of his Church. We fit into her with our small gift and do the best we can, especially those things that are always necessary: celebrating the sacraments, preaching the Word, giving signs of our charity and our love.

It's not just a job

I think that, above all, it is important that the faithful can see that the priest does not just perform a “job” with working hours, and then is free and lives only for himself, but that he is a passionate man of Christ who carries in himself the fire of Christ’s love. If the faithful see that he is full of the joy of the Lord and understand also that he

cannot do everything, they can accept limits and help the parish priest. This seems to me the most important point: that we can see and feel that the parish priest really feels his call from the Lord, that he is full of love for the Lord and for his faithful. If there is this, you understand and you can also see the impossibility of doing everything. So, being full of the joy of the Gospel with our whole being is the first condition.

Author: Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI, formerly Joseph Ratzinger, was born on April 16, 1927 in Marktl am Inn, Germany. He was ordained a priest on June 29, 1951. From 1946 to 1951, the year in which he was ordained a priest and began to teach, he studied philosophy and theology at the University of Munich and at the higher school in Freising.

In 1962 he was already well known when, at the age of 35, he became a consultor of the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joseph Frings, at the Second Vatican Council.

In March 1977, Pope Paul VI named Fr. Ratzinger Archbishop of Munich and Freising and on May 28, 1977 he was consecrated -the first diocesan priest in 80 years to take over the pastoral ministry of the large Bavarian diocese. Paul VI elevated him to the College of Cardinals in the consistory of June 27, 1977.

On November 25, 1981, he was nominated by John Paul II to be Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Cardinal Ratzinger was elected Vice Dean of the College of Cardinals on November 6, 1998. On November 30, 2002, he was elected as Dean of the College of Cardinals.

He served as President of the Commission for the Preparation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and after 6 years of work, he presented the New Catechism to the Holy Father in 1992.

Following the death of John Paul II on April 2, 2005, and his funeral on April 8, Cardinal Ratzinger presided over the conclave to elect a new pope as dean of the College of Cardinals. The conclave opened on April 18 and Cardinal Ratzinger was elected as the 265th Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church on April 19, 2005. He chose the name "Benedict" and became Pope Benedict XVI.

Live a life that draws people to penance

Every priest becomes a minister of Penance through his ontological configuration to Christ, the Eternal High Priest, who reconciles humanity with the Father; so the priest is charged with the responsibility of faithfully administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We live in a cultural context marked by the hedonistic and relativistic mindset that tends to delete God from the horizon of life and does not encourage the acquisition of a clear set of values to refer to that would help one to discern good from evil and develop a proper sense of sin.

This situation makes even more urgent the service of stewards of Divine Mercy. We must not forget, in fact, that a sort of vicious circle exists between the clouding of the experience of God and the loss of the sense of sin.... In the conditions of freedom in which it is now possible to exercise the priestly ministry, priests must live the response to their vocation “in a lofty manner,” for only those who become every day a living and clear

presence of the Lord can awaken in the faithful a sense of sin, impart courage, and give rise to the desire for God’s forgiveness.

Expert in the spiritual life

The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or

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politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life. With this end in view, when a young priest takes his first steps, he needs to be able to refer to an experienced teacher who will help him not to lose his way among the many ideas put forward by the culture of the moment. In the face of the temptations of relativism or the permissive society, there is absolutely no need for the priest to know all the latest, changing currents of

thought; what the faithful expect from him is that he be a witness to the eternal wisdom contained in the revealed word. Solitude for the quality of personal prayer and for good theological formation bears fruit in life. Living under the influence of totalitarianism

may have given rise to an unconscious tendency to hide under an external mask, and in consequence to become somewhat hypocritical. Clearly this does not promote authentic fraternal relations and may lead to an exaggerated concentration on oneself. In reality, we grow in affective maturity when our hearts adhere to God. Christ needs priests who are mature, virile, capable of cultivating an authentic spiritual paternity. For this to happen, priests need to be honest with themselves, open with their spiritual director, and trusting in divine mercy.

Being truly reasonable

Prudence, according to the Greek philosophical tradition, is the first of the cardinal virtues. It indicates the primacy of the truth, which, through “prudence,” becomes a criterion for our action. Prudence demands humble, disciplined, and watchful reason that does not let itself be blinded by prejudices; it does not judge according to desires and passions but rather seeks the truth, even though it may prove uncomfortable. Prudence means searching for the truth and acting in conformity with it. The prudent servant is first and foremost a man of truth and a man of sincere reason. God, through Jesus Christ, has opened wide for us the window of the truth, which, before our own mere forces, often remains narrow and only partially transparent. In Sacred Scripture and in faith in the

Church God shows us the essential truth about man, which impresses the right orientation upon our action. Thus, the first cardinal virtue of the priest as minister of Jesus Christ consists in letting himself be molded by the truth that Christ shows us. In this way we become truly reasonable people, who judge on the basis of the whole and not on chance details. Let us not allow ourselves to be guided by what we see through the small window of our personal astuteness, but, rather, let us look at the world and at human beings through the large window that Christ has opened to us on the whole truth and thus recognize what truly counts in life.

Sow trust and hope

There is another saying of Jesus’ that uses the image of the seed, and that can accompany the Parable of the Sower: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Here the Lord insists on the connection between the death of the seed and the “much fruit” that it will yield. The grain of wheat is he, Jesus. The fruit is having “life abundantly” (Jn 10:10), which he acquired for us through his Cross. This is also the logic and the true fruitfulness of every vocations ministry in the Church. Like Christ, the priest and the animator must be a “grain of wheat” who sacrifices itself to do the Father’s will; who lives hidden from the clamor and the noise; who renounces the search



for that visibility and grandiose image that today often become the criteria and even goals of life in a large part of our culture and that attract many young people.

Dear friends, be sowers of trust and hope. The word of God can truly become light and strength, a spring of hope, it can plot a path that passes through Jesus, the “path” and the “way”; through his Cross, which is the fullness of love.

Living with Christ for everyone

Immediately after his forced ordination, Augustine wrote to Bishop Valerius: “I was constrained ... to accept second place at the helm, when as yet I knew not how to handle an oar.... And from this derived the tears that some of my

brethren perceived me shedding in the city at the time of my ordination” (cf. Letter 21, 1ff.).

Augustine’s beautiful dream of a contemplative life had vanished. As a result, his life had fundamentally changed. He could now no longer dedicate himself solely to meditation in solitude. He had to live with Christ for everyone. He had to express his sublime knowledge and thoughts in the thoughts and language of the simple people in his city. The great philosophical work of an entire lifetime, of which he had dreamed, was to remain unwritten.

Instead, however, we have been given something far more precious: the Gospel translated into the language of everyday life and of his sufferings.

To attract all to communion

St. Paul thus said in Romans, chapter 15: “The grace given me by God to be ‘a minister’ of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service (hierourgein) of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (15:15ff.). I would like to emphasize only two aspects of this marvelous text. First of all, St. Paul interprets his missionary activity among the world’s peoples to build the universal Church as priestly service. To proclaim the Gospel in order to unite the peoples in

the communion of the Risen Christ is a “priestly” action. The apostle of the Gospel is a true priest, he does what is central to the priesthood: prepares the true sacrifice. And then the second aspect: the goal of missionary action is what we can say the cosmic liturgy: that the peoples united in Christ, the world, may as such become the glory of God, an “acceptable [offering], sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Here the dynamic aspect appears, the aspect of hope in the Pauline conception of worship: Christ’s gift of himself implies the aspiration to attract all to communion in his body, to unite the world. Only in communion with Christ, the exemplary man, one with God, does the world thus become as we all wish it to be: a mirror of divine

love. This dynamism is ever present in the Eucharist; this dynamism must inspire and form our life.

Know your gifts

The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life.

Certainly within the Church’s divinely-willed structure there is a distinction to be made between hierarchical and charismatic gifts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). Yet the very variety and richness of the graces bestowed by the Spirit invite us constantly to discern how these gifts are to be rightly ordered in the service of the Church’s mission. You, dear priests, by sacramental ordination

have been configured to Christ, the Head of the Body. You, dear deacons, have been ordained for the service of that Body. You, dear men and women religious, both contemplative and apostolic, have devoted your lives to following the divine Master in generous love and complete devotion to his Gospel. All of you, who fill this cathedral today, as well as your retired, elderly, and infirm brothers and sisters, who unite their prayers and sacrifices to your labors, are called to be forces of unity within Christ’s Body. By your personal witness, and your fidelity to the ministry or apostolate entrusted to you, you prepare a path for the Spirit. For the Spirit never ceases to pour out

his abundant gifts, to awaken new vocations and missions, and to guide the Church, as our Lord promised in this morning's Gospel, into the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

You are a foretaste of heaven

This life of special consecration was born to keep the Gospel always before the People of God, as a reminder that manifests, certifies, and proclaims to the whole Church the radical nature of the Gospel and the coming of the Kingdom. Dear consecrated men and women, by your dedication to prayer, asceticism, and growth in the spiritual life, to apostolic action and mission, you are progressing towards the heavenly Jerusalem, you are a foretaste of the eschatological Church, solid in her possession and loving contemplation of God who is love. How much we need this witness today! Many of our brothers and sisters live as if there were nothing beyond this life, and without concern for their eternal salvation. Men and women are called to know and love God, and the Church has the mission to assist them in this calling. We know well that God is the master of his gifts and that conversion is a grace. But we are responsible for proclaiming

the faith, the whole faith, with all its demands. Dear friends, let us imitate the Curé of Ars who prayed to the Lord in the following words: "Grant me the conversion of my parish, and I accept to suffer all that you wish for the rest of my life." And he did everything to pull people away from their own lukewarm attitude in order to lead them back to love.

The attractive aspect of virtue

There exists a deep solidarity among all the members of the Body of Christ. It is not possible to love Christ without loving his brothers and sisters. For their salvation John Mary Vianney decided to become a priest: "to win souls for the good God," as he said when, at eighteen years of age, he announced his vocation, just as Paul had said: "to win as many as I could" (1 Cor 9:19). The Vicar

General had told him: "there is not much love of God in the parish; you will bring it there." In his priestly passion, this holy parish priest was merciful like Jesus in meeting each sinner. He preferred to insist on the attractive aspect of virtue, on God's mercy, in comparison to which our sins are like "grains of sand." He pointed to the merciful love of God, which had been offended. He feared

that priests would become “insensitive” and accustomed to the indifference of their faithful: “Woe to the Pastor — he would warn — who remains silent while God is offended and souls are lost.”

You must be truly human

The other element is that the priest must be man, human in all senses. That is, he must live true humanity, true humanism; he must be educated, have a human formation, human virtues; he must develop his intelligence, his will, his sentiments, his affections; he must be a true man, a man according to the will of the Creator, of the Redeemer, for we

know that the human being is wounded and the question of “what man is” is obscured by the event of sin that hurt human nature even to the quick. Thus people say: “he lied,” “it is human”; “he stole,” “it is human” — but this is not really being human. Human means being generous, being good, being a just person, it means true prudence and wisdom. Therefore emerging with Christ’s help from this dark area in our nature so as to succeed in being truly human in the image of God is a lifelong process that must begin in our training for the priesthood. It must subsequently be achieved, however, and continue as long as we live.

