

# *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 World Is Dying Because It Lacks Worshipers*

*By Cardinal Robert Sarah*

The certainty that permeates every answer, and ultimately every question, is that there can be an answer, and that it is Christ. I have tried to limit my words as much as possible, to leave room for the testimony of the Gospels, the Church Fathers, and the Saints: those who encounter us do not need new words, new doctrines, new paths, or inventions, but rather that the eternal words, the perennial Word of God, reach us, illuminating the situations we experience in the present.

### **We need worshipers!**

Prayer is a silent, contemplative, loving gaze turned towards God. Prayer is looking at God and letting ourselves be looked at by God. This is what the peasant of Ars teaches us. The Curé of Ars, amazed to see him regularly and every day kneeling in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, asks him: “My friend, what are you doing here?” And he replied: “I look at Him and He looks at me!”

The then Cardinal Ratzinger, in his homily at the Missa *pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*, said: "Having a clear faith, according to the Creed of the Church, is often labelled as fundamentalism. While relativism, that is, letting oneself be carried 'here and there by every wind of doctrine', appears to be the only attitude suited to today's times. A dictatorship of relativism is being established which recognises nothing as definitive and which leaves as the ultimate measure only one's own ego and one's desires. We, however, have another measure: the Son of God, the

true man. He is the measure of true humanism. 'Adult' is not a faith which follows the waves of fashion and the latest novelty; adult and mature is a faith profoundly rooted in friendship with Christ." How dramatically relevant this text by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is!

The most urgent task is to recover the meaning of adoration and prostration with faith and wonder before the mystery of God! Like the Magi who "fell down and worshiped Him." The loss of the religious value of kneeling and the sense of adoring God is the source of all

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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.

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the fires and crises shaking the world and the Church, of the restlessness and dissatisfaction we see in our society. We need worshipers! The world is dying because it lacks worshipers! The Church is parched by the lack of worshipers. This is the first and privileged place of dialogue with God: the Tabernacle, His presence among us.

### **The Holy Mass is not a social assembly**

For the same reason, the Holy Mass is like a necessary and vital encounter with Christ. The Eucharist is the source of the Church's mission; sacred and beautiful celebrations for the glory of God and the sanctification of the people are essential to fostering trust with Him, that divine intimacy for which our existence yearns. For this reason too, the Holy Mass, celebrated in the national languages, must never lose its sense of the sacred or betray the word of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Mass is not a social gathering to celebrate ourselves and

our works; it is not a cultural display, but the commemoration of the death and resurrection of the Lord, which the Church has always celebrated for centuries.

The Eucharist is not only the source and summit of the life of the Church, as the Second Vatican Council wisely recalled; the Eucharist is also the source of its mission: "An authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church."

We too must be able to say to our brothers and sisters with firm conviction: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with

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our hands, concerning the Word of life [...], which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

There is nothing more beautiful than

personally and intimately encountering Jesus Christ and sharing Him with everyone. The very institution of the Eucharist, moreover, anticipates the

heart of Jesus' mission. He is the Father's envoy for the redemption of the world (John 3:16-17; Rom 8:32). At the Last Supper, he entrusted to his disciples the Sacrament that makes the sacrifice of the Cross present until the end of time. We must correct that widespread mentality according to which the Holy Mass is simply a "replication" of the Last Supper, a fraternal, convivial gathering among friends. It is also and always Christ's Calvary, the bloodless Sacrifice: there is no banquet without sacrifice! The priest knows well that, when he ascends the steps of the altar, he is ascending Calvary with Jesus, to give his life, to die with Him!

The words with which Pope Benedict XVI began his Petrine ministry were moving, stating: "There is nothing more beautiful than knowing Him and communicating to others our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, of the fisher of men, can often appear tiring. But it is beautiful and great, because ultimately it is a service to joy, to the joy of God who wants to

enter the world."

As we repeat in Eucharistic Prayer IV: "In your mercy, you have come to meet all, so that those who seek you may find you."

### **Christ, the only savior of man**

My certainty as a man, as a Christian, as a priest, and as a successor to the Apostles is the consequence and expression of what I have experienced in life and what the Church, in her wisdom, has always affirmed: Christ is the only way! "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6)

Scripture and Tradition remind us: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which

we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) The prophet Isaiah affirms that no one has ever seen or heard of a God doing so much for those who trust in Him (cf. Is 64:3). Isaiah speaks to us as one in love with God; from his words we know that God is in love with humanity, made in

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His image. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16). If only the world knew this! If only each of us always kept this gift, this mercy, this predilection in mind!

We are immeasurably more blessed than the prophet Isaiah: he implored God to rend the heavens and come down (cf. Is 63:19), we contemplate him in our midst. King David wondered where to look for help (cf. Ps 121), we know that our help is in the Lord Jesus. The entire tradition of the Church teaches that Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, is the only savior of humanity, and that there is salvation in no one else. Whoever reaches salvation outside the

visible confines of Christianity always and only does so through the merits of Christ on the Cross and not without a certain mediation of the Church.

### **In Christianity we find the answer to man's questions**

The answer to all the questions that every man asks himself is found in Christianity, the only possible answer to that aspiration to the True, the Good, the Beautiful, the Just, which dwells in the heart of each of us, is Christ.

All religions are, in fact, a human attempt to reach the Mystery, a human attempt to “stammer” something about God and with God. As an attempt, it

can also be good: human reason can reach certain universal truths, not without the help (even if unspoken) of the Holy Spirit. The fact that there can be truth and goodness in other cultural traditions cannot but make us rejoice, as it becomes an opportunity for dialogue and a possible shared journey. But Christianity is something else entirely!

Christianity is not a human attempt to reach God, but the announcement, filled with wonder and gratitude, of the historical fact that God has reached humanity in Jesus Christ, God made man. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,” St. Paul reminds us (Gal 4:4).

### **Doctrine is the flesh of Christ**

As I recall in the book, we distinguish between a more specifically “pastoral” level, one of human encounter, and a theological-doctrinal one: we know that the former depends on the latter, and not vice versa! It’s not theory that

depends on practice (which is actually a Marxist principle), but, on the contrary, good pastoral practice stems from good theology, and bad theology leads to pastoral disasters. In this sense, it’s also important to correct the mistaken idea that theology, or even doctrine, are theoretical, ideas! This isn’t the case!

Doctrine is the flesh of Christ, his visibility in time and history, just like the Church. It is the concrete way to express, over time, how much the event of Revelation has taught us about God and humanity. Betraying doctrine, therefore, can mean betraying Christ himself. We do not want to be traitors to our fellow

human beings; instead, we want to share our hope with them, we desire their access to salvation—to the extent that Revelation has given us knowledge, and while upholding God’s freedom to judge as just those who have rightly followed the natural law, which He Himself has placed in their hearts. Basing our certainty on sound doctrine—that is, on the complete and organic teaching

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of what Jesus accomplished, in signs and words, which His Apostles handed down as truth learned directly from Him and as the treasure of the First Church that arose around Him—does not allow us to consider what has been handed down to us as false or incomplete. The Spirit enlightens us first and foremost through those same words that so many of our brothers and sisters have heard before us, over the centuries.

We need not invent anything; there is no evolution of doctrine. Just as a child in its mother's womb grows and develops, is born, lives as a child, a boy, and then reaches the fullness of adulthood, so doctrine develops, until it encounters the Lord of history and the cosmos. It cannot and must not deny anything that has happened, but must embrace its providential nature and bring to humanity, according to the needs of the times, the unchanging Good News.

Development must be “organic,” meaning that the legitimate development and deepening of revealed truth, obviously with the assistance of reason and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, must always be absolutely connected to and dependent on previous doctrine, without absolutely new and disorganized elements, without leaps

and, above all, without contradictions. Development, in this sense, is always the development of something that already exists, which simply needs to be more fully manifested; it can never be the completely innovative insertion of something foreign and totally new. As in the simple example I gave: we could say that a man develops, growing in his body, but he never grows a third arm or a second nose! Development must always be organic, orderly, unitary.

For this reason we can, with just pride, reaffirm what Scripture and the Tradition of the Church always remind us: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Therefore, standing before Him, as St. Thomas did, placing his head close to the Tabernacle—even putting it inside!—meditating on what Jesus wants to tell us in that moment: through the liturgy, through the ordered prayer of the Psalter, through the testimony of his saints—is already Grace, is already the beginning of change, of conversion, both for ourselves and for the world.

We are confident and joyful—striving to correct our limitations and hand them over to the One who can overcome them—because Christianity is not just

one path among others, but THE Path! “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,” Jesus teaches (John 14:6). Unmistakable words, which indicate Christ’s unprecedented claim : that of being God!

We believe that God became man, we know that man is the way of the Church: therefore, nothing that is truly human (evil and sin, in fact, do not belong to God’s plan) is foreign to Christianity and the Church. In this sense, the Incarnation is the profound reason for all the sympathy the Church has for all men. For this reason, because of the Incarnation, the Church has been a bulwark against all attempts by the powers of this world to enslave man, to oppress him, to denature him, to destroy him.

### **Moral liberalism and globalist ethics**

Having abandoned God, the belief has gained ground that moral liberalism leads to progress in civilization. However,

observation of reality highlights how this supposed progress is, in reality, a moral and anthropological decline, a new form of paganism that has desacralized humanity and human relationships. It even claims to establish who has the right to live, and the most vulnerable pay the price: the unborn child, the elderly, the disabled, and ultimately all the abandoned, convinced they are a burden to society, their friends, and even their own families.

The Church, deeply concerned with saving the whole human being, body and soul, has always prioritized evangelization, education through schools, and human health through the opening of dispensaries and hospitals. In this defense of humanity and the sacredness of human life, we cannot allow the powers of this world, whether expressed as national or supranational governments (think of the UN and its branches; military defense pacts that later become offensive) to dictate utilitarian and inhumane agendas.

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We are wary of the new globalist ethic promoted by the UN; we are wary of gender ideology!

### **Life belongs to God**

Let us not make the Church a humane and horizontal society, speaking a media language that makes it popular and with an acceptable message! My friends, such a church interests no one! The world has no need of a Church that offers only a reflection, even a faded one, of the world itself! We know that life belongs to God, because it is given by God. We are not its masters but its custodians; no man can decide to end his own life. No law, no constitution, no government has authority, power, or right over a person's life. Without recognizing this, everything collapses! Little by little, any ethic can be questioned, and only the law of the strongest remains, which is barbaric: a woman is stronger than the child she carries; an adult is stronger than a child; an employer is stronger than an employee; a billionaire is stronger than a nation. Once the restraints of the principles that preceded us are abandoned, and the rights of God are no longer recognized, what rights can be recognized for human beings? Let us not retreat from this task; let us not fear!

### **Diabolical plan against the Tridentine Mass**

"In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What was sacred for previous generations also remains sacred and great for us, and cannot suddenly be completely prohibited or even judged harmful. It does us all good to preserve the riches that have grown in the faith and prayer of the Church, and to give them their rightful place." (Benedict XVI)

For this reason, even the plan to definitively erase the traditional Tridentine Mass, a rite that dates back to St. Gregory the Great, a 1600-year-old liturgy, a Mass that has made so many saints and has been celebrated by so many saints: St. Padre Pio, St. Philip Neri, St. John Mary Vianney (the Curé of Ars), St. Francis de Sales, St. Josemaria Escrivá, etc. And going back to Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) and even to Pope St. Damasus (366-384). This plan, if it is real, seems to me an insult to the history of the Church and to Holy Tradition, a diabolical plan that seeks to break with the Church of Christ, the Apostles, and the Saints.

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### **The Pope is not an absolute monarch**

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that “the First Vatican Council did not define the Pope as an absolute monarch, but, on the contrary, as the guarantor of obedience to the Word handed down: his authority is linked to the tradition of faith: this is also true in the context of the Liturgy. It is not ‘made’ by a bureaucratic apparatus. Even the Pope can only be a humble Servant of its proper development and of its permanent integrity and identity... The authority of the Pope is not unlimited; it is at the service of Sacred Tradition. Even less can a generic ‘freedom’ to act, which turns into arbitrariness, be reconciled with the essence of faith and of the liturgy. The greatness of the liturgy – we must repeat it even more often – is founded precisely on its non-arbitrariness.”

### **To Jesus, through Mary**

Let us live every moment of our lives intensely! Intensely doesn't mean frenetically. Intense is a life of tension, like the spark that witnesses the passage of electricity between two poles. Our tension is toward Christ, toward Him present, toward Him awaiting us.

In this, His Holy Mother helps us: the first creature to recognize and welcome Him, the first to carry Him—on that singular journey to her cousin Elizabeth—as a living monstrosity; the first to follow Him on earth, becoming a daughter of her Son; the only one who is always present wherever He is present. She, who brought about the first miracle; She, present in the supreme sacrifice of the Passion; May She intercede for us so that we may be worthy of receiving Him each day, “until He comes.” (1 Cor 11:26)

Thank you!