

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN XXIII TO THE SEMINARIANS OF THE ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY

Great is the joy which fills Our heart at this moment as We stand in the chapel of the Villa of the Roman Seminary: for Us a place rich in happy memories and deep unforgettable emotions. The mind goes back without difficulty to the fruitful years of Our preparation for the priesthood, to the anxious expectation of the day of ordination, to the atmosphere of piety, of study, of gaiety, amid which our seminary life was lived.

HAPPY MEMORIES

Soon after Our ordination to the priesthood on 10th August 1904 in S. Maria in Montesanto, Our good Angel Guardian accompanied Us to the crypt of the Confession in St Peter's where, amid a group of close friends, We quietly celebrated Our first Holy Mass. The beloved Vice-Rector, Domenico Spolverini, was Our assistant priest, and he was accompanied by three or four former students of the Seminary, then having their first experiences of priestly work.

The light of grace of that happy morning was about Us a few hours later as a result of the kindly gesture of the Holy Father Pius X, who rested his revered hand on Our head as if to consecrate the humble but earnest desire for a priestly life with a word of fatherly good wishes and as a sign in advance of consolation pro Ecclesia Sancta Dei.

Imagine with what joy, not unmixed with excitement, We hastened to reach the beloved Seminary here at Roccantica, where there awaited Us at the turning of the road from Rome the unexpected sight of the Villa undergoing its first successful test of lighting by night; down at the bridge there was the meeting with the whole Seminary: revered Superiors and dear students, who introduced Us into this beloved chapel, all redolent of the sweetness of Franciscan poetry from the ancient painting above the altar.

In addition, the venerated image of our beloved Madonna della Fiducia welcomed Us here - a Mother ever devoted and kindly, ever in the happy company of Her sons in Rome and in the country. It is with the liveliest emotion that We still recall the celebration of Our second Holy Mass here at this altar on 12th August of that year, the feast of St Clare of Assisi. Our Rector, Mgr. Bugarini, of revered memory, was at Our side to assist Us, and the equally beloved and blessed Father Francesco Pitocchi, with a touching little sermon on the Gospel; and the beautiful and devout arrangement for the occasion of « Tu es sacerdos » by one of our students - We still

recall him with sadness - Mgr. Alfonso de Sanctis, Bishop of Todi, whom a year ago We went to visit in limine vitae.

With these, and many, many other precious and sweet memories, We are back here at what is still Our Seminary, after more than half a century of priestly work from the day We left it to travel in obedience along the paths of the world in the exercise of a sacred ministry, from very humble tasks to those of the *Servus servorum Dei* reserved to Us by Providence for these final years.

THE NOURISHMENT OF THE PRIESTLY LIFE

Beloved sons, it is with reverence and almost with trembling that We utter these words: sacred ministry; sacred ministry of a priest, of a pastor. In Christo Iesu et in Ecclesia Sancta. They sum up the whole of life: yours, dear sons, in spe et in initio, and that which is expressed in every grade of the hierarchy of order and jurisdiction, for whom goes up, suffused with a trembling eager desire, the supplication of the Greater Litanies: « Ut Domnum apostolicum et omnes ecclesiasticos ordines in sancta religione conservare digneris, to rogamus audi nos... ».

Yes, Jesus Christ at the centre of our faith and of our life: He is the nobiscum Dominus: present in the Gospel, present, ever living with us, in the Blessed Sacrament. From this twofold source of divine light the priestly life draws its nourishment, its strength, its beauty and its glory. Is not the preparation for the Priesthood which begins in the Seminary almost entirely a breathing-in of this intense faith which is deep and ardent love poured out in the ascetical elevation of the spirit, a joy in contemplation, a sweet intimacy, a power of imitation and a kind of transformation, along with Christ patient and suffering usque ad mortem?

THE CHARACTERISTIC OFFICE OF THE PRIEST

To leave ever more vividly before your eyes this teaching and this intercourse of your soul and your youth with the presence of Christ who calls you to the priesthood, We have brought a valuable monstrance which, from time to time will repeat to you, as it reminds you of this visit We are paying to you, not only the splendour of the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ in the world - rex et centrum omnium cordium - but also the characteristic office of a priest, which is to carry Christ visibly everywhere and to perform this duty honourably and with edification of the people, of this people of ours which holds in veneration the upright and holy priesthood. Oh, what dignity is ours, to be everywhere Christum ferentes in mundo ad omnium salutem et benedictionem.

THE NEW PRIESTHOOD THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

And with Christ Jesus and His Holy Church. The priesthood is wholly for the Church. Christ is the first, the eternal High Priest, clothed by the heavenly Father with the most exalted dignity of Redeemer of the world, not by means of the sacrifices of the Old Law, but by proprium sanguinem: and this dignity which

He has as the first, the eternal High Priest, has conferred on Him the right to form the new priesthood. It is Christ, then, who institutes the new priesthood to be the foundation of His Church. See how He examines St Peter, the first of His Apostles, and once the proof of his loyalty and love is obtained, confers on him the dignity of a founder. Tu es Petrus; et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam. Alongside the first have been raised up the other disciples to the same priesthood; but Peter remains the head, to teach, to rule, to give life. This is the Church of the centuries, and to this the generations of men declare their adherence with the words of the Apostles' Creed, < Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam >, - words more explicit still in the Creed of Constantinople: (Credo) in unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam.

These are four words which truly gather together the whole substance of the teaching and law of Our Lord, of which the Roman Church is the authentic and faithful depositary.

THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL A NEW PENTECOST

Beloved sons, you are among those very close to the great event which is being prepared for, and which is being hailed in advance with universal expectancy, namely, the 2^od Vatican Ecumenical Council.

At the beginning of your priesthood, you will be called upon to play your part in the application of this extraordinary Epiphany, or rather, of a new Pentecost. It is right that from now on you should take the very keenest interest in it.

Reflect on the unity of the Church, which rightly deserves the title of sacramentum unitatis: an expression which frequently recurs in the sacred liturgy and is entirely in the last message of Christ, according to the testimony of the fourth Evangelist, repeated as a cry of longing and as a sigh: « ut unum sint, ut unum sint ».¹

Reflect on the holiness of the Church which can have no better triumph than in the exemplary lives, in the first place of her priests, and then in the countless millions of souls dedicated to love and sacrifice after the example of the Divine Model who is in the highest

degree the solus Dominus, the solus sanctus, the solus altissimus, Iesus Christus.

Reflect on the catholicity of the Church existing everywhere, even in the remotest corners of the world, diverse in its rites but bound together in its universal structure and organization. We were reading in the Breviary only yesterday, the 14' Sunday after Pentecost, the words of St Gregory: « Regnum sanctae Ecclesiae perfectione universitatis solidatur ».

Then finally, there is the note of the apostolicity of the Church, a most powerful and dynamic force; a heavenly fire destined to enkindle the whole earth. The euntes docete omnes gentes 3 of Christ to his disciples ever re-echoes over the face of the whole world, not only as a continuation of the early apostolic mandate and purity of aims and methods, after the example of the great leaders of the Catholic Church, the confessors and martyrs of the Faith, but as a driving-force of prayer, cooperation and merit expressed by the other invitation of Christ: rogate Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam.

What grandeur, what luminous beauty of vision in the extension of the cares of the Christian apostolate over the immense regions of the entire world!

The task, then, of the Ecumenical Council now being prepared is this. Wide enough to include all that can have reference to the so called four great marks of the Church, and worthy of being followed not only from the point of view of the historical investigation of the past, but with the aim of pointing to that which, on the basis of experience, present circumstances suggest may be more immediate and effective ways of carrying out the divine will of Jesus Christ, the burning desire of His heart: Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?

PART TO BE PLAYED BY SEMINARIANS

We therefore call upon the young seminarians - and We rightly begin the expression of Our desire with you, beloved pupils of the Roman Seminary: historically first in its foundation according to the teachings and dispositions of the Council of Trent, and first in dignity as the Seminary of the Bishop of Rome for his diocese. - We expect from you, therefore, in the preparation of the great event, a spiritual sharing, quiet and earnest, which We wish to be followed by all the Seminarians of the world, to whom will be given news of the happy meeting which is taking place today.

This sharing could be two-fold: keen interest in the preparatory stages of the Council, and earnest prayer, private as well as in common, that the grace of Christ may inform, enlighten and

enkindle all who are already, or who will be, called upon to give their personal contribution of knowledge and advice to the deliberations of the Council.

For some months now, there have been multiplying outlines, meetings, publications of various kinds as well as notable books, directed to the preparation of a literature, extensive and complete, on the whole of this noble theme.

The excellent students of our seminaries, especially those farthest advanced in their theological course - without any slackening in their zeal for the great and important exercises in connection with their ordinary course while rightly being careful to preserve themselves from any extravagances and false hypotheses, with that touch of internal humility which opens the path to the deepest possible penetration, will feel themselves quickly invigorated at the uprising of the ecclesiastical spirit, through which will be fulfilled in them what is said in Psalm 44: Propter veritatem et mansuetudinem et iustitiam deducet te mirabiliter dextera tua.

As for prayer, especially in these solemn and laborious hours in the life of Holy Church, We are glad to gather inspiration for an injunction We wish to give you; not one destined to remain on this secluded hill of Roccantica, but to traverse the distances, to touch the young of every language and of every nation who are preparing with you for the chaste and holy joy of the priesthood.

The injunction, then, is for a worldwide supplication which will daily draw together in unity all the sons of the Sanctuary to cooperate in prayer and by a life of ever greater fervour, for the great meeting of the Council, in order that it may correspond to the expectation of the whole Catholic world and of all men of good will.

Pray then, beloved sons; pray every day for the Council. You will be the first to experience its unique and wondrous atmosphere, - We repeat - the first to put it into practice perhaps at the very beginning of your priesthood. May you also be able to enjoy the fruits, which will be the more abundant and certain the more your prayer of petition of today will have merited them.

PRAYER TO THE MADONNA DELLA FIDUCIA

Holy Virgin, Madonna della Fiducia, who dost ever keep maternal watch over thy seminarians as once upon a time, with thy smile, thou didst bring gladness to the Apostles in the Supper Room, look with a special love upon thy sons; defend them from dangers of soul

and body; fill them with a love ever more fervent for Jesus Christ, thy Son most holy, so that, by transforming themselves into Him, they may fully promote the desires of His divine heart.

Along with these intentions, dear sons, We leave you Our Apostolic Blessing, which with Our whole heart We wish to extend to your most worthy Rector, to the Superiors of the Roman Seminary, together with all your dear families, now present in Our affection and Our prayer.

PRAYER FOR THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

O Divine Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of Jesus, Who dost infallibly assist and guide the Church, pour forth the fulness of Thy gifts upon the Ecumenical Council.

Kind Teacher and Comforter, enlighten the minds of our Bishops, who, responding to the invitation of the Sovereign Roman Pontiff, will gather in solemn assembly.

Grant that from this Council there may come forth abundant fruits: that the light and strength of the Gospel may ever more widely influence human society; that new vigour may infuse the Catholic religion and its missionary task; that the Church's teaching may be better known and Christian morality more widely practiced.

Sweet Guest of our souls, confirm our minds in truth, and dispose our hearts to obedience, so that the decisions of the Council may find in us generous acceptance and prompt fulfillment.

We beseech Thee, too, on behalf of those sheep who no longer belong to the one fold of Jesus Christ, that they also, glorying as they do in the name of Christian, may finally regain unity under one Shepherd.

Renew in our time Thy wondrous works, as in a new Pentecost, and grant that holy Church, gathered together in unanimous, more intense prayer, around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and guided by Peter, may spread the kingdom of the Divine Saviour, which is the kingdom of truth, of justice, of love, and of peace. Amen.