

Benedict XVI on the *Tria Munera*

Munus docendi

Wednesday, 14 April 2010

In this Easter Season that brings us to Pentecost and also ushers us into the celebrations for the closure of the Year for Priests, scheduled for this coming 9-11 June, I am eager to devote a few more reflections to the topic of the ordained Ministry, elaborating on the fruitful realities of the priest's configuration to Christ the Head in the exercise of the *tria munera* that he receives: namely, the three offices of teaching, sanctifying and governing.

In order to understand what it means for the priest to act *in persona Christi Capitis* in the person of Christ the Head and to realize what consequences derive from the duty of representing the Lord, especially in the exercise of these three offices, it is necessary first of all to explain what "representation" means. The priest represents Christ. What is implied by "representing" someone? In ordinary language it usually means being delegated by someone to be present in his place, to speak and act in his stead because the person he represents is absent from the practical action. Let us ask ourselves: does the priest represent the Lord in this way? The answer is no, because in the Church Christ is never absent, the Church is his living Body and he is the Head of the Church, present and active within her. Christ is never absent, on the contrary he is present in a way that is untrammelled by space and time through the event of the Resurrection that we contemplate in a special way in this Easter Season.

Therefore the priest, who acts *in persona Christi Capitis* and representing the Lord, never acts in the name of someone who is absent but, rather, in the very Person of the Risen Christ, who makes himself present with his truly effective action. He really acts today and brings about what the priest would be incapable of: the consecration of the wine and the bread so that they may really be the Lord's presence, the absolution of sins. The Lord makes his own action present in the person who carries out these gestures. These three duties of the priest which Tradition has identified in the Lord's different words about mission: teaching, sanctifying and governing in their difference and in their deep unity are a specification of this effective representation. In fact, they are the three actions of the Risen Christ, the same that he teaches today, in the Church and in the world. Thereby he creates faith, gathers together his people, creates the presence of truth and really builds the communion of the universal Church; and sanctifies and guides.

The first duty of which I wish to speak today is the *munus docendi*, that is, the task of teaching. Today, in the midst of the educational emergency, the *munus docendi* of the Church, exercised concretely through the ministry of each priest, is particularly important. We are very confused about the

fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are. Regarding all this, there are numerous contrasting philosophies that come into being and disappear, creating confusion about the fundamental decisions on how to live; because collectively we no longer know from what and for what we have been made and where we are going. In this context the words of the Lord who took pity on the throng because the people were like sheep without a shepherd came true (cf. Mk 6: 34). The Lord had noticed this when he saw the thousands of people following him in the desert because, in the diversity of the currents of that time, they no longer knew what the true meaning of Scripture was, what God was saying. The Lord, moved by compassion, interpreted God's word, he himself is the Word of God, and thus provided an orientation. This is the function in persona Christi of the priest: making present, in the confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world. Therefore the priest does not teach his own ideas, a philosophy that he himself has invented, that he has discovered or likes; the priest does not speak of himself, he does not speak for himself, to attract admirers, perhaps, or create a party of his own; he does not say his own thing, his own inventions but, in the medley of all the philosophies, the priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead. What Christ said of himself applies to the priest: "My teaching is not mine" (Jn 7: 16); Christ, that is, does not propose himself but, as the Son he is the voice, the Word of the Father. The priest too must always speak and act in this way: "My teaching is not mine, I do not spread my own ideas or what I like, but I am the mouthpiece and heart of Christ and I make present this one, shared teaching that has created the universal Church and creates eternal life".

This fact, namely that the priest does not invent, does not create or proclaim his own ideas, since the teaching he announces is not his own but Christ's does not mean, however, that he is neutral, as if he were a spokesman reading a text that he does not, perhaps, make his own. In this case too the model of Christ who said: "I do not come from myself and I do not live for myself but I come from the Father and live for the Father" applies. Therefore, in this profound identification, Christ's teaching is that of the Father and he himself is one with the Father. The priest who proclaims Christ's word, the faith of the Church, and not his own ideas, must also say: "I do not live by myself and for myself, but I live with Christ and by Christ and therefore all that Christ said to us becomes my word even if it is not mine". The priest's life must be identified with Christ and, in this manner, the word that is not his own becomes, nevertheless, a profoundly personal word. On this topic St Augustine, speaking of priests said: "And as for us, what are we? Ministers (of Christ), his servants; for what we distribute to you is not ours but we take it from his store. And we too live of it, because we are servants like you" (Sermo 229/E, 4).

The teaching that the priest is called to offer, the truth of the faith, must be internalized and lived in an intense personal and spiritual process so that the priest really enters into a profound inner

communion with Christ himself. The priest believes, accepts and seeks to live, first of all as his own, all that the Lord taught and that the Church has passed on in that process of identification with his own ministry of which St John Mary Vianney is an exemplary witness (cf. Letter for the inauguration of the Year for Priests). “For in charity itself we are all listening to him, who is our One Master in heaven” (En. in Ps 131: 1, 7).

Consequently the priest’s voice may often seem to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Mk 1: 3), but his prophetic power consists precisely in this: in never being conformist, in never conforming to any dominant culture or mindset but, rather, in showing the one newness that can bring about an authentic and profound renewal of the human being, that is, that Christ is the Living One, he is the close God, the God who works in the life and for the life of the world and gives us the truth, the way to live.

In the careful preparation of Sunday preaching, without excluding weekday preaching, in imparting catechetical formation in schools, in academic institutions and, in a special way, through that unwritten book which is his own life, the priest is always an “educator”, he teaches; yet not with the presumption of one who imposes his own truth but on the contrary with the humble, glad certainty of someone who has encountered the Truth, who has been grasped and transformed by it, hence cannot but proclaim it. In fact, no one can choose the priesthood on his own, it is not a means of obtaining security in life or achieving a social position: no one can give it to him nor can he seek it by himself. The priesthood is the response to the Lord’s call, to his will, in order to become a herald of his truth, not a personal truth but of his truth.

Dear brother priests, the Christian people ask to hear from our teachings the genuine ecclesial doctrine, through which they can renew their encounter with Christ who gives joy, peace and salvation. In this regard Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the Catechism of the Catholic Church are indispensable reference points in the exercise of the munus docendi, so essential for conversion, the development of faith and the salvation of humankind. “Priestly ordination... means... to be immersed in the Truth” (Homily at the Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, 9 April 2009), that Truth which is not merely a concept or a collection of ideas to be assimilated and passed on but, rather, is the Person of Christ with whom, for whom and in whom to live and thus, necessarily, the timeliness and comprehensibility of the proclamation are also born. Only this knowledge of a Truth that became a Person in the Incarnation of the Son justifies the missionary mandate: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16: 15). Only if it is the Truth is it intended for every creature, it is not the imposition of some thing but openness of heart to what the creature has been created for.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the Lord has entrusted a great task to priests: to be heralds of his word, of the Truth that saves; to be his voice in the world to bring what serves the true good of souls and the authentic path of faith (cf. 1 Cor 6: 12). May St John Mary Vianney be an example to all priests.

He was a man of great wisdom and heroic fortitude in resisting the cultural and social pressures of his time in order to lead souls to God: simplicity, fidelity and immediacy were the essential features of his preaching, the transparency of his faith and of his holiness. The Christian People was edified by him and as happens for genuine teachers in every epoch recognized in him the light of the Truth. In him it recognized, ultimately, what should always be recognizable in a priest: the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Munus sanctificandi

Wednesday, 5 May 2010

Last Sunday, on my Pastoral Visit to Turin, I had the joy of pausing in prayer before the Holy Shroud, joining the more than two million pilgrims who have been able to contemplate it during the solemn Exposition of these days. That sacred Cloth can nourish and foster faith and reinvigorate Christian devotion because it is an incentive to go to the Face of Christ, to the Body of the Crucified and Risen Christ, to contemplate the Paschal Mystery, the heart of the Christian Message. We, dear Brothers and Sisters, are living members of the Body of the Risen Christ, alive and active in history (cf. Rom 12: 5), each one in accordance with the role, that is, the task the Lord has wished to entrust to each one of us. Today, in this Catechesis, I would like to return to the specific tasks of priests, which tradition claims are essentially three: teaching, sanctifying and governing. In one of our previous Catecheses I spoke on the first of these three duties: teaching, the proclamation of the truth, the proclamation of God revealed in Christ or, in other words the prophetic task of putting the person in touch with the truth, of helping him to know the essential of his life, of reality itself.

Today I would like to reflect with you briefly on the priest's second duty, that of sanctifying people, above all through the sacraments and the worship of the Church. Here we must ask ourselves first of all: what does the word "Holy" mean? The answer is: "Holy" is God's specific quality of being, namely, absolute truth, goodness, love, beauty pure light. Thus sanctifying a person means putting him or her in touch with God, with this being light, truth, pure love. It is obvious that such contact transforms the person. The ancients had this firm conviction: no one can see God without dying instantly. The power of truth and light is too great! If the human being touches this absolute current, he cannot survive. On the other hand there is also the conviction: without a minimal contact with God man cannot live. Truth, goodness and love are fundamental conditions of his being. The question is: how can man find that contact with God, which is fundamental, without dying overpowered by the greatness of his divine being? The Church's faith tells us that God himself creates this contact that gradually transforms us into true images of God.

Thus we have once again arrived at the priest's task of "sanctifying". No man on his own, relying on his own power, can put another in touch with God. An essential part of the priest's grace is the gift,

the task of creating this contact. This is achieved in the proclamation of God's word in which his light comes to meet us. It is achieved in a particularly concentrated manner in the Sacraments. Immersion in the Paschal Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ takes place in Baptism, is reinforced in Confirmation and Reconciliation and is nourished by the Eucharist, a sacrament that builds the Church as the People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 32). Thus it is Christ himself who makes us holy, that is, who draws us into God's sphere. However, as an act of his infinite mercy, he calls some "to be" with him (cf. Mk 3: 14) and to become, through the Sacrament of Orders, despite their human poverty, sharers in his own priesthood, ministers of this sanctification, stewards of his mysteries, "bridges" to the encounter with him and of his mediation between God and man and between man and God (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5).

In recent decades there have been tendencies that aim to give precedence, in the priest's identity and mission, to the dimension of proclamation, detaching it from that of sanctification; it is often said that it would be necessary to go beyond a merely sacramental pastoral ministry. Yet, is it possible to exercise the priestly ministry authentically by "going beyond" the sacramental ministry? What exactly does it mean for priests to evangelize, in what does the professed "primacy of proclamation" consist? As the Gospels report, Jesus says that the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is the goal of his mission; this proclamation, however, is not only a "discourse" but at the same time includes his action; the signs and miracles that Jesus works show that the Kingdom comes as a present reality and in the end coincides with his very Person, with his gift of himself, as we heard today in the Gospel Reading. And the same applies for the ordained ministry: he, the priest, represents Christ, the One sent by the Father, he continues his mission, through the "word" and the "sacrament", in this totality of body and soul, of sign and word. Referring to priests in a letter to Bishop Honoratus of Thiabe, St Augustine says: "Let those, therefore, who are servants of Christ, his ministers in word and sacrament, do what he has commanded or permitted" (Letter 228, 2). It is necessary to reflect on whether, in some cases, having underestimated the faithful exercise of the *munus sanctificandi* might not have represented a weakening of faith itself in the salvific efficacy of the sacraments, and ultimately in the actual action of Christ and of his Spirit, through the Church, in the world.

Who, therefore, saves the world and man? The only answer we can give is: Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, Crucified and Risen. And where is the Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ that brings about salvation? In Christ's action through the Church, and in particular in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which makes the redemptive sacrificial offering of the Son of God present in the sacrament of Reconciliation in which from the death of sin one returns to new life, and in every other sacramental act of sanctification (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5). It is therefore important to encourage an appropriate catechesis to help the faithful understand the value of the sacraments; but it is likewise necessary, after the example of the Holy Curé d'Ars, to be available, generous and attentive in giving the brothers and sisters the treasures of grace that God has placed in our hands,

and of which we are not the “masters” but rather caretakers and stewards. Especially in this time of ours, in which, on the one hand it seems that faith is weakening, and, on the other, a profound need and a widespread quest for spirituality are emerging, it is essential that every priest remember that in his mission the missionary proclamation and worship and the sacraments are never separate and encourage a healthy sacramental ministry, to form the People of God and to help it experience to the full the Liturgy, the Church’s worship and the sacraments as freely given gifts of God, free and effective gestures of his saving action.

As I recalled in the Holy Chrism Mass this year: “At the centre of the Church’s worship is the notion of ‘sacrament’. This means that it is not primarily we who act, but God comes first to meet us through his action, he looks upon us and he leads us to himself... God touches us through material things... that he takes up into his service, making them instruments of the encounter between us and himself” (Chrism Mass, 1 April 2010). The truth according to which in the Sacrament “it is not primarily we who act” (ibid.), also concerns and must concern priestly awareness: each priest knows well that he is an instrument necessary to God’s saving action but also that he is always only an instrument. This awareness must make priests humble and generous in the administration of the Sacraments, in respect of the canonical norms, but also in the deep conviction that their mission is to ensure that all people, united to Christ, may offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him (cf. Rom 12: 1). St John Mary Vianney, once again, is exemplary with regard to the *munus sanctificandi* and the correct interpretation of the sacramental ministry; one day, to a man who was saying that he had no faith and wished to ask him about it, the parish priest answered: “Oh! My friend, you are not really speaking to the right person, I do not know how to reason... but if you need some comfort, sit there... (and he pointed to the ever present stool in the confessional) and believe me, many others have sat there before you and have had nothing to regret” (cf. Monnin, A., *Il Curato d’Ars, Vita di Gian-Battista-Maria Vianney*, Vol. I, Turin 1870, pp. 163-164).

Dear priests, experience the Liturgy and worship with joy and love: it is an action which the Risen One carries out with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, with us and for us. I would like to renew the invitation made recently to “return to the confessional as a place in which to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also as a place in which “to dwell” more often, so that the faithful may find compassion, advice and comfort, feel that they are loved and understood by God and experience the presence of Divine Mercy beside the Real Presence in the Eucharist” (Address to participants in the course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary, 11 March 2010). And I would also like to ask each priest to celebrate and to live intensely the Eucharist which is at the heart of the duty of sanctifying; it is Jesus who wants to be with us, to live in us, to give himself to us, to show us God’s infinite mercy and tenderness; it is the one sacrifice of the love of Christ who makes himself present, who makes himself real among us and arrives at the throne of Grace, at God’s presence... embraces humanity... and unites us with him (cf. Discourse to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of

Rome, 18 February 2010). And the priest is called to be a minister of this great Mystery, in the Sacrament and in life. If “the great ecclesial tradition has rightly separated sacramental efficacy from the concrete existential situation of the individual priest and so the legitimate expectations of the faithful are appropriately safeguarded”, this correct doctrinal explanation takes nothing “from the necessary, indeed indispensable aspiration to moral perfection that must dwell in every authentically priestly heart”: there is also an example of faith and the testimony of holiness, that the People of God rightly expect from its Pastors (cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy, 16 March 2009). And it is in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries that the priest finds the root of his holiness (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, nn. 12-13).

Dear Friends, may you be aware of the great gift that priests are for the Church and for the world; through their ministry the Lord continues to save men, to make himself present, to sanctify. May you be able to thank God and above all be close to your priests with prayer and support, especially in difficulty, so that there may be more and more Pastors in accordance with the Heart of God. Many thanks.

Munus regendi

Wednesday, 26 May 2010

The Year for Priests, is drawing to a close; therefore I began to talk in the last Catecheses about the essential tasks of the priest: to teach, to sanctify and to govern. I have already given two Catecheses, one on the ministry of sanctification, the Sacraments above all, and one on that of teaching. So it remains for me today to speak of the priest’s mission to govern, to guide - with the authority of Christ, not his own the portion of the People that God has entrusted to him.

How can we comprehend in our modern day culture a dimension of this kind that implies the concept of authority and has its origins in the Lord’s own mandate to tend his flock? What is authority really, for us Christians? The cultural, political and historical experiences of the recent past, above all the dictatorships in Eastern and Western Europe in the 20th century, have made contemporary man suspicious of this concept. A suspicion which is often expressed in a conviction that it is necessary to eliminate every kind of authority does not come exclusively from man, and is not regulated and controlled by him. But it is precisely in reviewing those regimes which in the last century disseminated terror and death, that we are forcibly reminded that authority, in every circumstance, when it is exercised without reference to the Transcendent, if it neglects the Supreme Authority, which is God, inevitably finishes by turning against man. It is important, therefore, to recognize that human authority is never an end in itself but always and only a means and that, necessarily and in every age, the end is the person, created by God with his own inviolable dignity and called to relate to his Creator, both along the path of his earthly journey and in eternal life; it is

an authority exercised in responsibility before God, before the Creator. An authority whose sole purpose is understood to be to serve the true good of the person and to be a glass through which we can see the one and supreme Good, which is God. Not only is it not foreign to man, but on the contrary, it is a precious help on our journey towards a total fulfilment in Christ, towards salvation.

The Church is called and commits herself to exercise this kind of authority which is service and exercises it not in her own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ, who received from his Father all authority both in Heaven and on Earth (cf. Mt 28: 18) Christ tends his flock through the Pastor of the Church, in fact: it is he who guides, protects and corrects them, because he loves them deeply. But the Lord Jesus, the supreme Shepherd of our souls, has willed that the Apostolic College, today the Bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter and the priests, their most precious collaborators, to participate in his mission of taking care of God's People, of educating them in the faith and of guiding, inspiring and sustaining the Christian community, or, as the Council puts it, "to see to it... that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation in accordance with Gospel preaching, and to sincere and active charity" and to exercise that liberty with which Christ has set us free (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6). Every Pastor, therefore, is a means through whom Christ himself loves men: it is through our ministry, dear priests, it is through us that the Lord reaches souls, instructs, guards and guides them. St Augustine, in his Commentary on the Gospel of St John, says: "let it therefore be a commitment of love to feed the flock of the Lord" (cf. 123, 5); this is the supreme rule of conduct for the ministers of God, an unconditional love, like that of the Good Shepherd, full of joy, given to all, attentive to those close to us and solicitous for those who are distant (cf. St Augustine, Discourse 340, 1; Discourse 46, 15), gentle towards the weakest, the little ones, the simple, the sinners, to manifest the infinite mercy of God with the reassuring words of hope (cf. *ibid.*, Epistle, 95, 1).

Even if this pastoral task is founded on the Sacraments, its efficacy is not independent of the personal existence of the priest. In order to be a priest according to the heart of God (cf. Jer 3: 15) it is necessary that not only the mind, but also the freedom and the will be deeply rooted in living friendship with Christ, a clear awareness of the identity received in Priestly Ordination, an unconditional readiness to lead the flock entrusted to him where the Lord desires and not in the direction which might, apparently, seem easier or more convenient. This requires, above all, a continuous and progressive willingness to allow Christ himself to govern the sacerdotal life. In fact, no one is really able to feed Christ's flock, unless he lives in profound and true obedience to Christ and the Church, and the docility of the people towards their priests depends on the docility of the priests towards Christ; for this reason the personal and constant encounter with the Lord, profound knowledge of him and the conformation of the individual will to Christ's will is always at the root of the pastoral ministry .

During the last decades, we have heard the adjective "pastoral" used almost as if it were in opposition to the concept of "hierarchical", and in the same way the idea of "communion" has also

been set against it. At this point it may be useful to make a brief comment on the word “hierarchy”, which is the traditional designation of the structure of sacramental authority within the Church, ordered according to the three levels of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, episcopate, presbyterate, diaconate: The concept of “hierarchy” carries, in public opinion, an element of subordination and of judgement; therefore to many the concept of hierarchy appears to be in contrast with the flexibility and vitality of the pastoral meaning and also appears contrary to the humility of the Gospel. However, this is a misunderstanding of the meaning of hierarchy, which arose in historical times from abuses of authority and careerism. But these are, in fact, abuses, and have nothing to do with the essential meaning of “hierarchy” itself. Common opinion holds that “hierarchy” is something connected with dominion and therefore cannot correspond to the real sense of the Church, that is unity in the love of Christ. But, as I have said, this is a mistaken interpretation, which has its origins in the abuses of the past, but does not correspond to the real meaning of hierarchy. Let us begin with the word. The word hierarchy is generally said to mean “sacred dominion”, yet the real meaning is not this, but rather “sacred origin”, that is to say: this authority does not come from man himself, but it has its origins in the sacred, in the Sacrament; so it subjects the person in second place to the vocation, to the mystery of Christ; it makes of the individual a servant of Christ, and only as a servant of Christ can he govern and guide for Christ and with Christ. Therefore he who enters into the Sacred Order of the Sacrament, the “hierarchy”, is not an autocrat but he enters into a new bond of obedience to Christ: he is tied to Christ in communion with the other members of the Sacred Order, the Priesthood. Nor can the Pope, reference point for all the Pastors and for the communion of the Church, do what he likes; on the contrary, the Pope is the custodian of obedience to Christ, to his word summed up in the “*regula fidei*”, in the Creed of the Church, and must lead the way in obedience to Christ and to his Church. Thus hierarchy implies a triple bond: in the first place the bond with Christ and with the order given by Our Lord to his Church; then the bond with the other Pastors in the one communion of the Church; and lastly, the bond with the faithful who are entrusted to the individual, in the order of the Church.

Therefore it is clear that communion and hierarchy are not contrary to each other, but they influence each other. Together they form one thing (hierarchical communion). The Pastor fulfils his role precisely when he guides and protects his flock and sometimes prevents it from scattering. Except in a vision which is clearly and explicitly supernatural, the task of governing which belongs to the priest is incomprehensible. On the contrary, sustained by a sincere desire for the salvation of each believer, he is particularly precious and necessary, also in our time. If the aim is to spread the message of Christ and to lead men and women towards a saving encounter with him, so that they may have life, then the task of guiding appears as a service lived in pure giving, for the edification of the flock in truth and holiness, often going against the tide, and remembering that he who is greater must act as the lesser, and he who governs as he who serves (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 27).

Where can a priest today find the strength for such an exercise of his ministry, in full fidelity to Christ and to the Church, and complete devotion to his flock? There is only one answer: in Christ the Lord. Jesus' way of governing was not through dominion, but in the humble and loving service of the Washing of the feet, and the kingship of Christ over the Universe is not an earthly triumph, but reaches its highest point on the wood of the Cross, which becomes a judgement for the world and a point of reference for the exercising of that authority which is the true expression of pastoral charity. The saints, among them St John Mary Vianney, carried out with love and devotion the task of caring for the portion of God's People entrusted to them, showing themselves to be strong and determined men with the single aim of promoting the true good of souls, and capable of paying a price in person, even to martyrdom, in order to remain faithful to the truth and justice of the Gospel.

Dear priests, "tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly... being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5: 2). Therefore, do not be afraid to lead to Christ each one of the brethren whom he has entrusted to you, certain that every word and every action will bear fruit if they come from obedience to God's will: know how to live in appreciating the merits and in recognition of the limits of the culture in which we find ourselves, with the firm assurance that the proclamation of the Gospel is the greatest service to render to man. In fact, there is no greater good, in this earthly life, than to lead people to God, to reawaken faith, to lift the person out of his inertia and desperation, to give the hope that God is near and directs our personal histories and that of the world: this, in the ultimate analysis, is the deep and final meaning of the task of governing that the Lord has given to us. To form Christ in believers, through that process of sanctification that is a conversion of criteria, scale of values, and patterns of behaviour, to allow Christ to live in every one of the faithful. St Paul sums up his pastoral action in these words, "my little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4: 19).

Dear brothers and sisters, I should like to invite you to pray for me, the Successor of Peter, who have a specific task in governing the Church of Christ, as have all your Bishops and priests. Pray that we may know how to take care of all the sheep, including those that are lost, that make up the flock entrusted to us. You, dear priests, I cordially invite to the closing celebrations of the Year for Priests, to be held on the 9th, 10th, and 11th June, here in Rome: we shall meditate on conversion and on mission, on the gift of the Holy Spirit and on the relationship with Mary Most Holy, and we shall renew our priestly promises, sustained by all the People of God. Thank you!