CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

ADORATION, REPARATION, SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD FOR PRIESTS

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2007

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CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

Your Excellency,

In today's world a great many things are necessary for the good of the Clergy and the fruitfulness of pastoral ministry. With a firm determination to face such challenges without disregarding their difficulties and struggles, and with an awareness that action follows being and that the soul of every apostolate is Divine intimacy, it is our intention that the departure point be a spiritual endeavor. In order to continually maintain a greater awareness of the ontological link between the Eucharist and the Priesthood, and in order to recognize the special maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary for each Priest, it is our intention to bring about a connection between perpetual Eucharistic adoration for the reparation of faults and sanctification of priests and the initiation of a commitment on the part of consecrated feminine souls - following the typology of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Eternal High Priest, and Helper in his work of Redemption - who might wish to spiritually adopt priests in order to help them with their self-offering, prayer, and penance.

According to the constant content of Sacred Tradition, the mystery and reality of the Church cannot be reduced to the hierarchical structure, the liturgy, the sacraments, and juridical ordinances. In fact, the intimate nature of the Church and the origin of its sanctifying efficacy must be found first in a mystical union with Christ.

According to the doctrine and the very structure of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, such a union cannot be conceived separately from the Mother of the Word Incarnate - the one whom Jesus desired to be intimately united with Himself for the salvation of all humanity.

Therefore, it is no accident that on the same day in which the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was promulgated – 21 November 1964 – Pope Paul VI also proclaimed the Blessed Virgin Mary as "Mother of the Church," i.e., mother of the faithful and the pastors.

With reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Second Vatican Council expresses itself in these words: "She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace." (*LG* 61).

Without adding or detracting from the singular mediation of Christ Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary is acknowledged and invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. She is the model of maternal love who must inspire all those who cooperate – through the apostolic mission of the Church – in the regeneration of all humanity (*cfr LG* 65).

In light of these teachings, which belong to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, the faithful are called to turn their eyes to Mary - shining example of every virtue - and imitate her as the first disciple. It is she to whom every other disciple was entrusted by Christ as she stood at the foot of the cross (*cfr Jn* 19:25-27). By becoming her children, we learn the true meaning of life in Christ.

Thereby – and precisely because of the place occupied and the role served by the Most Blessed Virgin in salvation history – we intend in a very particular way to entrust all Priests to Mary, the Mother of the High and Eternal Priest, bringing about in the Church *a movement of prayer, placing 24 hour continuous Eucharistic adoration at the center, so that a prayer of adoration, thanksgiving, praise, petition, and reparation, will be raised to God, incessantly and from every corner of the earth, with the primary intention of awakening a sufficient number of holy vocations to the priestly state and, at the same time, spiritually uniting with a certain spiritual maternity – at the level of the Mystical Body – all those who have*

already been called to the ministerial priesthood and are ontologically conformed to the one High and Eternal priest. This movement will offer better service to Christ and his brothers - those who are at once "inside" the Church and also "at the forefront" of the Church, standing in Christ's stead and representing Him, as head, shepherd and spouse of the Church (*cfr. Pastores Dabo Vobis* 16).

We are asking, therefore, all diocesan Ordinaries who apprehend in a particular way the specificity and irreplaceability of the ordained ministry in the life of the Church, together with the urgency of a common action in support of the ministerial priesthood, to take an active role and promote – in the different portions of the People of God entrusted to them - true and proper cenacles in which clerics, religious and lay people - united among themselves in the spirit of true communion – may devote themselves to prayer, in the form of continuous Eucharistic adoration in a spirit of genuine and authentic reparation and purification. For this purpose, we enclose a leaflet that more fully explains the nature of the initiative, as well as a form to fill out and return to this Congregation if there is the intention – as we hope - to adhere to the project presented in this letter in a spirit of faith.

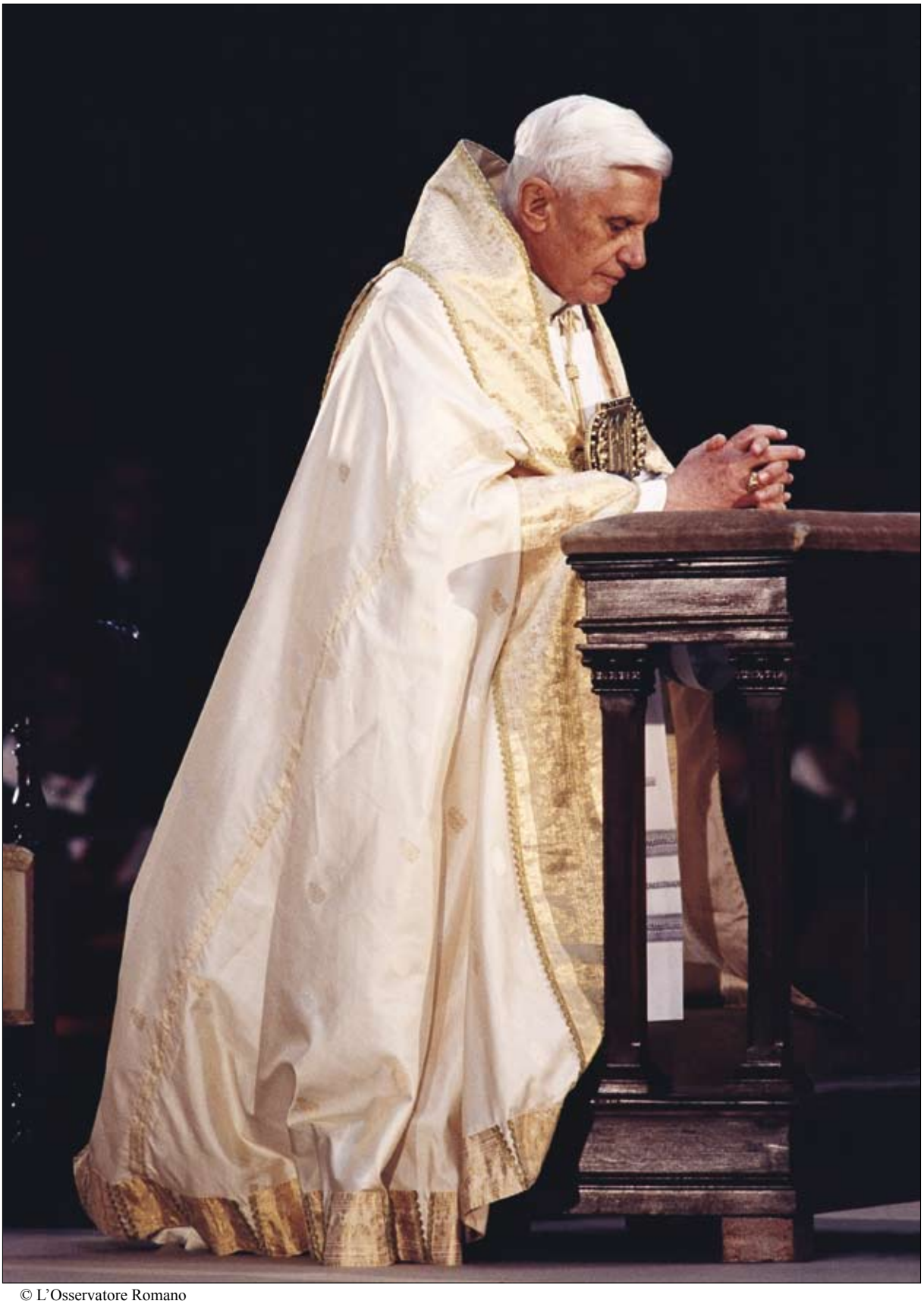
May Mary, Mother of the One, Eternal High Priest, bless this initiative, and may she intercede before God, pleading for an authentic renewal of priestly life, taking as a model the only possible model: Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd!

I greet you cordially in the bond of ecclesial communion, with sentiments of profound collegial affection.

Cláudio Card. Hummes
Prefect

✠ Mauro Piacenza
Secretary

From the Vatican, 8 December 2007
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary



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"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers!"

"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers". This means that the harvest is ready, but God wishes to enlist helpers to bring it into the storehouse. God needs them. He needs people to say: Yes, I am ready to become your harvest labourer; I am ready to offer help so that this harvest which is ripening in people's hearts may truly be brought into the storehouses of eternity and become an enduring, divine communion of joy and love.

"Pray the Lord of the harvest" also means that we cannot simply "produce" vocations; they must come from God. This is not like other professions, we cannot simply recruit people by using the right kind of publicity or the correct type of strategy. The call which comes from the heart of God must always find its way into the heart of man. And yet, precisely so that it may reach into hearts, our cooperation is needed.

To pray the Lord of the harvest means above all to ask him for this, to stir his heart and say: "Please do this! Rouse labourers! Enkindle in them enthusiasm and joy for the Gospel! Make them understand that this is a treasure greater than any other, and that whoever has discovered it, must hand it on!"

We stir the heart of God. But our prayer to God does not consist of words alone; the words must lead to action so that from our praying heart a spark of our joy in God and in the Gospel may arise, enkindling in the hearts of others a readiness to say "yes". As people of prayer, filled with his light, we reach out to others and bring them into our prayer and into the presence of God, who will not fail to do his part. In this sense we must continue to pray the Lord of the harvest, to stir his heart, and together with God touch the hearts of others through our prayer. And he, according to his purpose, will bring to maturity their "yes", their readiness to respond; the constancy, in other words, through all this world's perplexity, through the heat of the day and the darkness of the night, to persevere faithfully in his service. Hence they will know that their efforts, however arduous, are noble and worthwhile because they lead to what is essential, they ensure that people receive what they hope for: God's light and God's love.

Benedict XVI

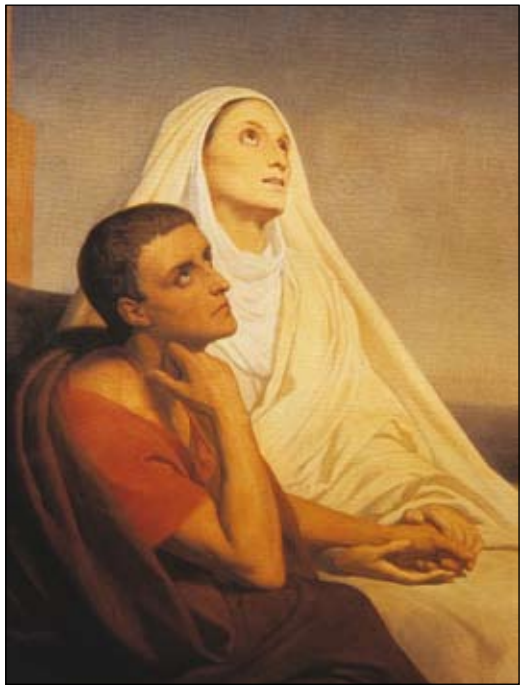
Meeting with the priests and deacons in Freising, Germany, 14 September 2006

SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD FOR PRIESTS

The vocation to be a spiritual mother for priests is hardly unknown,
barely understood and consequently, rarely lived too little although fundamental
and vitally important. It is a vocation that is often hidden,
not apparent to the human eye, but intended to transmit spiritual life.
Pope John Paul II, convinced of this, founded a cloistered convent in the Vatican
where nuns would pray for his intentions as Supreme Pontiff.

"I HAVE MY MOTHER TO THANK FOR WHAT I HAVE BECOME AND THE WAY THAT I GOT THERE!"

St. Augustine



Independent of age or social status, everyone can become a mother for priests. This type of motherhood is not only for family mothers, but is just as valid for an unmarried girl, for a widow, or for someone who is ill. It is especially pertinent for missionaries and religious sisters who have given their lives entirely to God for the sanctification of others. John Paul II even thanked a child for her motherly help: *"I also express my gratitude to Bl. Jacinta for the sacrifices and prayers offered for the Holy Father, whom she saw suffering greatly"* (13 May 2000).

Every priest has a mother and often she is a spiritual mother for her children as well. Giuseppe Sarto, for example, the future Pope Pius X, visited his 70-year-old mother after being ordained a bishop. She kissed her son's ring and, suddenly pensive, indicating her own simple silver wedding band said, *"Yes, Giuseppe, you would not be wearing that ring if I had not first worn mine."* Pope St. Pius X rightfully confirms his experience that, *"Every vocation to the priesthood comes from the heart of God, but it goes through the heart of a mother!"*

One sees this very well in the life of St. Monica. Augustine, who lost his faith at the age of 19 during his studies in Carthage, later wrote in his famous *Confessions* regarding his mother:

"For love of me, she cried more tears than a mother would over the bodily death of her son. Nine years passed in which I wallowed in the slime of that deep pit and the darkness of falsehood. Yet that pious widow desisted not all the hours of her supplications, to bewail my case unto Thee where her prayers entered into Thy presence."

After his conversion, Augustine said thankfully, *"My holy mother never abandoned me. She brought me forth in her flesh, that I might be born to this temporal light, and in her heart, that I might be born to life eternal."*

St. Augustine always desired to have his mother present at his philosophical discussions. She listened attentively and sometimes intervened with such fine intuition that the scholars who had gathered were astounded by her inspired responses to intricate questions. Who should be surprised then that Augustine described himself as *her* "disciple of philosophy"!

A Cardinal's Dream

Nicholas Cardinal of Cusa (1401-1464), Bishop of Brixen, was not only a great Church politician, reputable Papal legate and reformer of spiritual life for the clergy and the faithful of the 15th century, but also a man of silence and contemplation. He was deeply moved by a dream in which he was shown the spiritual reality which has meaning for priests and indeed, for all people to this very day: the power of self-offering, prayer and the sacrifice of spiritual mothers hidden in convents.

The offering of hands and hearts

Nicholas and his guide entered a small, ancient church decorated with mosaics and frescoes from the early centuries, and there the cardinal saw an amazing sight. More than a thousand nuns were praying in the little church. Despite the limited space, they all fit due to their slender and composed nature. The sisters were praying, but in a way that the cardinal had never seen. They were not kneeling but standing; their gaze was not cast off into the distance but rather fixed on something nearby which he could not see. They stood with open arms, palms facing upwards in a gesture of offering.

Surprisingly, in their poor, thin hands they carried men and women, emperors and kings, cities and countries. Sometimes there were several pairs of hands joined together holding a city. A country, recognizable by its national flag, was supported by a whole wall of arms, and yet even then there was an air of silence and isolation around each one of them in prayer. The majority of nuns, however, carried one individual in their hands.

In the hands of a thin, young, almost child-like nun, Nicholas saw the Pope. You could see how heavy this load was for her, but her face was radiating a joyful gleam. Standing in the hands of one of the older sisters he saw himself, Nicholas of Cusa, Bishop of Brixen, and Cardinal of the Roman Church. He saw the wrinkles of his age; he saw the blemishes of his soul and his life in all their clarity. He looked with stunned and surprised eyes, but his fright was soon mixed with an unspeakable bliss.

His guide whispered, *"Now you see how sinners are sustained and carried and, in spite of their sins, have not given up loving God."*

"What about those who do not love anymore?" the Cardinal asked. Suddenly, he was in the crypt of the church with his guide, where once again, more than a thousand nuns were praying. Whereas the former ones were carried in the nuns' hands, here in the crypt, they were carried in their hearts. They were exceptionally serious because the fate of eternal souls was

at hand. *So you see, Your Eminence,"* said the guide, *"that also those who have given up loving are still carried. It happens occasionally that they become warm again through the ardent hearts which are being consumed for them—occasionally, but not always. Sometimes, in the hour of their death, they are taken from these saving hands into the hands of the Divine Judge, and they must also answer for the sacrifice that has been made for them. Every sacrifice bears fruit. However, when the fruit offered to somebody is not picked, the fruit of corruption ripens."*

The Cardinal was captivated by the women who made an offering of their life. He always knew they existed, but he saw now, clearer than ever, their importance for the Church, for the world, for nations and for every individual. Only now was it so surprisingly clear. He bowed deeply before these martyrs of love.

For more than half a millennium, Saben was the Bishop's Seat for the diocese of Brixen beginning in the year 550. The bishop's castle was later converted into a convent for Benedictine nuns in 1685. To this day, they live their spiritual motherhood by praying and consecrating themselves to God just as Nicholas of Cusa saw in his dream.

Eliza Vaughan

It is a fact that vocations to the priesthood must be prayed for;
Jesus speaks about it himself in the Gospel:
"The harvest is abundant, but the labourers are few;
so ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest" (Mt. 9:37-38).
Eliza Vaughan, an English family mother, is a particularly encouraging example of a woman with a priestly spirit who prayed very much for vocations.

Let us give our children to God

Eliza came from a strong Protestant family, that of Rolls-Royce. Yet even during her childhood education in France, she was deeply impressed by the exemplary efforts the Catholic Church made for the poor.

After she married Colonel John Francis Vaughan in the summer of 1830, Eliza converted to the Catholic Faith, despite the objection of her relatives. During the time of the Catholic persecution in England under Queen Elisabeth I (1558-1603), the Vaughan's ancestors preferred imprisonment and expropriation to being unfaithful to their beliefs.

Courtfield, the ancestral family home, became a place of refuge for priests during the decades of terror in England, a place where the Holy Mass was often celebrated secretly. Nearly three centuries had now passed, but the Catholic beliefs of the family had not changed.

Eliza was someone who converted with all her heart, so much so, that in her religious enthusiasm, she even proposed to her husband that they offer all their children back to God.

Convinced of the power of silent, faithful prayer,
Eliza spent an hour in adoration every day
praying for vocations in her family.
The mother of six priests and four religious sisters,
her prayer was bountifully heard. Mother Vaughan
died in 1853 and was buried in the grounds
of her beloved family property, Courtfield.

Today, Courtfield is a retreat center
for different groups in the Welsh diocese of Cardiff.
In consideration of Eliza's holy life,
the family chapel was consecrated as the shrine
of "Our Lady of Vocations" by the bishop in 1954
and confirmed as such in the year 2000.

This remarkable woman made a habit of praying for an hour each day before the Blessed Sacrament in the house chapel at Courtfield. She prayed to God for a large family and for many religious vocations among her children. And her prayers were heard! She gave life to 14 children and died shortly after the birth of the last child, John, in 1853.

Of the 13 children that lived, six of her eight boys became priests: two priests in religious orders, one diocesan priest, a bishop, an archbishop and a cardinal. From the five daughters, four became nuns in religious orders. What a blessing for the family and what an impact on all of England!

The Vaughan children enjoyed a pleasant childhood because their virtuous mother knew how to educate them in a very natural way by uniting spiritual and religious obligations with amusement and cheerfulness. Thanks to their mother, prayer and daily Mass in the house chapel were just as much a part of everyday life as music, athletics, amateur theatre, horse riding and playing. It was never boring for the children when their mother told them stories from the lives of the saints, who little by little became their dearest friends.

Mother Vaughan happily let her children accompany her on visits to the sick and needy of the area. On such occasions, they learned how to be generous, to make sacrifices and to give away their savings or their toys.

Shortly after the birth of her 14th child, Eliza died. Two months after her death, Colonel Vaughan wrote in a letter that he was convinced divine providence brought Eliza to him. *"I thanked the Lord in adoration today that I could give back to him my dearly beloved wife. I poured out my heart to him, full of thankfulness that, as an example and a guide, he gave me Eliza with whom I am still now bound by an inseparable, spiritual bond. What wonderful consolation and grace she brought me! I still see her as I always saw her before the Blessed Sacrament: her inner purity and extraordinary human kindness which her beautiful face reflected during prayer."*

Labourers in the vineyard of the Lord

The many vocations from the Vaughan family are really a unique legacy in British history and a blessing which came especially through Mother Eliza.

At the age of 16, Herbert, the oldest son, shared with his parents that he wanted to become a priest. Their reactions were very different. His mother, who had prayed a great deal for it, only smiled and said, *"Child, I have known it for a long time."* The father, however, needed a little time to come to terms with the decision, since the inheritance goes to the oldest and he had hoped Herbert would have a prestigious military career. How could he have known that his son would one day be the Archbishop of Westminster, founder of the Millhill Missionaries and a cardinal? Yet the father also bowed to his wishes writing once to his friend, *"If God wants Herbert for himself, he can have all the others as well."*

During a personal summer retreat at the age of 16,
Herbert Vaughan decided to become a priest.
He was ordained in Rome at the age of 22
and later became the Bishop of Salford, England
and founder of the Millhill Missionaries who today
work all over the world. He was eventually made
a cardinal and the third Archbishop of Westminster.
His motto on his coat of arms reads:
"Amare et servire!" "Love and serve!"
Cardinal Vaughan said,
"These two words express my agenda:
Love must be the root
from which all my service blossoms."

Whereas Reginald married, as did Francis, who inherited the family possessions, the Lord did call nine other Vaughan children. Roger, the second oldest, became a Benedictine prior and later the beloved Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, where he built the Cathedral. Kenelm was a Cistercian and later a diocesan priest; Joseph, the fourth son, became a Benedictine prior like his brother and founded a new abbey.

Bernard, the most lively of them all, who loved dancing, sports and anything fun, became a Jesuit. It is said that the day before he entered the order, he still went to a ball where he told his dance partner, *"This dance with you is my last, because I am joining the Jesuits."*

Shocked, the girl replied, *"Really? You want to become a Jesuit!? You who love the world so much and are such an excellent dancer!?"*

His equivocal, but beautiful answer was, *"That is why I am consecrating myself to God."*

John, the youngest, was ordained a priest by his oldest brother, Herbert, and later became the Auxiliary Bishop of Salford, England.

Four of the five daughters in the family entered convents. Gladis entered the Order of the Visitation, Teresa joined the Sisters of Mercy, Claire became a Poor Clare, and Mary an Augustinian prioress. Margaret, the fifth Vaughan daughter, wanted to be a religious sister, but could not due to her poor health. She lived at home, also consecrated to God, but was able to join a convent in her later years.

Blessed Maria Deluil Martiny (1841-1884)

Approximately 120 years ago, Jesus began to reveal his plan for the renewal of the priesthood to consecrated women living in convents and in the world. He entrusted this so-called "Priest Work" to spiritual mothers.

Blessed *Maria Deluil Martiny* (1841-1884) is a precursor of this work for priests. Regarding this great intention of her heart, Mother Maria Deluil Martiny said, *"To offer yourself for souls is beautiful and great… but to offer yourself for the souls of priests is so beautiful, so great, that you would have to have a thousand lives and offer your heart a thousand times… I would gladly give my life if only Christ could find in priests what he is expecting from them. I would gladly give it even if just one of them could perfectly realize God's divine plan for him!"*

She did, in fact, seal her priestly motherhood with the blood of martyrdom at age 43. Her last words were, "*This is for the work, for the Priest Work!"*

Servant of God Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche (1868-1915)

Jesus prepared the Servant of God *Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche* over the course of many years for her apostolate for the renewal of the priesthood. The Lord appeared to her on June 6, 1902, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, while she was in adoration, *"praying to him for our little novitiate, I asked him to give me some souls I might form for him. He replied: 'I will give you the souls of men.' Being profoundly astonished by these words, the sense of which I did not understand, I remained silent…until Jesus said: 'I will give you the souls of priests.' Still more astonished I asked him: 'My Jesus how will you do that?' …Then he showed me that he has a special work to do, which is to enkindle the fire of love again in the world, and that he wishes to make use of his priests to accomplish it." "He said to me: 'Nineteen centuries ago, twelve men changed the world; they were not merely men, but they were priests. Now, once more twelve priests could change the world…but they must be holy.'"* Subsequently, the Lord let Louise Margaret see the outcome of the Work. *"It is a special union of priests, a Work, which encompasses the whole world,"* she wrote. *"Priests who will form part of this work will undertake, among other things, to preach Infinite Love and mercy, but first his heart must be penetrated by Jesus and enlightened by his spirit of love. They must be united among themselves, having but one heart and one soul, and never impeding one another in their activities.'"*

Louise Margaret wrote so impressively about the priesthood in her book "The Sacred Heart and the Priesthood", that it was assumed that the anonymous author must have been an experienced priest. A Jesuit even exclaimed, *"I do not know who wrote this book, but one thing I do know, it is not the work of a woman!"*

Lu Monferrato

The little village of Lu, northern Italy, with only a few thousand inhabitants, is in a rural area 90 kilometres east of Turin. It would still be unknown to this day if, in the year 1881, the family mothers of Lu had not made a decision that had "serious consequences".

The deepest desire of many of these mothers was for one of their sons to become a priest or for a daughter to place her life completely in God's service. Under the direction of their parish priest, Msgr. Alessandro Canora, they gathered every Tuesday for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, asking the Lord for vocations. They received Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month with the same intention. After Mass, all the mothers prayed a particular prayer together imploring for vocations to the priesthood.

Through the trusting prayer of these mothers and the openness of the other parents, an atmosphere of deep joy and Christian piety developed in the families, making it much easier for the children to recognize their vocations.

This picture is indeed unique in the annals of the Catholic Church.
From 1 to 4 September 1946, the majority of the 323 priests and religious met in their village of Lu for a reunion which attracted world-wide attention.

Did the Lord not say, *"Many are called, but few are chosen"* (Mt 22:14)? In other words, many are called, but only a few respond to that call. No one expected that God would hear the prayers of these mothers in such an astounding way.

From the tiny village of Lu came 323 vocations!: 152 priests (diocesan and religious), and 171 nuns belonging to 41 different congregations. As many as three or four vocations came from some of these families. The most famous example is the Rinaldi family, from whom God called seven children. Two daughters became Salesian sisters, both of whom were sent to San Domingo as courageous, pioneer missionaries. Five sons became priests, all joining the Salesians. The most well-known of the Rinaldi brothers is Blessed Philip Rinaldi, who became the third successor of St. John Bosco as Superior General of the Salesians. Pope John Paul II beatified him on 29 April 1990. In fact, many of the vocations from this small town became Salesians. It is certainly not a coincidence, since St. John Bosco visited Lu four times during his life. The saint attended the first Mass of his spiritual son, Fr. Philip Rinaldi in this village where he was born. Philip always fondly recalled the faith of the families of Lu: *"A faith that made our fathers and mothers say, 'The Lord gave us our children, and so if He calls them, we can't say no.'"*

Fr. Luigi Borghina and Fr. Pietro Rota lived the spirituality of Don Bosco so faithfully that the former was called the "Brazilian Don Bosco" and the latter the "Don Bosco of Valtellina". Pope John XXIII once said the following about another vocation from Lu, His Excellency, Evasion Colli, Archbishop of Parma: *"He should have become pope, not me. He had everything it takes to become a great pope."*

Every ten years, the priests and sisters born in Lu come together from all around the world. Fr. Mario Meda, the long-serving parish priest of Lu, explained that this reunion is a true celebration, a feast of thanksgiving to God who has done such great things for Lu.

The prayer that the mothers of Lu prayed was short, simple, and deep:

"O God, grant that one of my sons may become a priest!
I myself want to live as a good Christian
and want to guide my children always to do what is right,
so that I may receive the grace, O God, to be allowed to give you a holy priest! Amen."

Blessed Alessandrina da Costa

(1904-1955)

An impressive example from the life of Alexandrina da Costa (1904-1955), who was beatified on 25 April 2004, shows the transforming power and visible impact of a sick and forgotten girl.

In 1941, Alexandrina wrote to her spiritual director, Fr. Mariano Pinho, that Jesus had asked of her, *"My daughter, a priest living in Lisbon is close to being lost forever; he offends me terribly. Call your spiritual director and ask his permission that I may have you suffer in a special way for this soul during the passion."*

Once Alexandrina had received permission from her spiritual director, she suffered greatly. She felt the severity of this priest's errors, how he wanted to know nothing about God, and was close to self-damnation. She even heard the priest's full name. Poor Alexandrina experienced the hellish state of this priest's soul and prayed urgently, *"Not to hell, no! I offer myself as a sacrifice for him, as long as you want."*

Fr. Pinho wanted to find out from the cardinal of Lisbon if, at that time, one of the priests of his diocese was of particular concern. The cardinal openly confirmed that he was, in fact, very worried about one of his priests, and when he mentioned the name of the priest, it was the same as Jesus had said to Alexandrina.

Some months later, Fr. Pinho's friend, Fr. David Novais, recounted to him an unusual incident. Fr. David had just held a retreat in Fatima where among those present was a modest gentleman whose exemplary behaviour made him pleasantly attractive to all the participants. On the last night of the retreat, this man suddenly had a heart attack. He requested a priest to whom he confessed and received Holy Communion. Shortly thereafter, he died, fully reconciled with God. It turned out that this man dressed as a layperson was actually a priest—the very priest for whom Alexandrina had suffered so much.

Servant of God
Consolata Betrone

(1903-1946)

The sacrifices and prayers of a spiritual mother for priests benefit especially those who have gone astray or who have abandoned their vocations. Jesus calls countless women in his Church to this praying vocation, like Sister Consolata Betrone, a Capuchin nun from Turin. Jesus said to her, *"Your life-long task is for your brothers. Consolata, you too, shall be a good shepherdess and go in search of your brothers and bring them back to me."*

Consolata offered everything for "her brother" priests and others consecrated to God who were in spiritual need. While working in the kitchen, she prayed continuously in her heart, *"Jesus, Mary, I love you, save souls!"*, and she consciously made every little service and duty into a sacrifice. Jesus said in this regard, *"These are all meaningless things, but because you bring them to me with such love, I confer immeasurable value to them and shower them on the discontented brothers as grace for conversion."*

Very grave and difficult cases were often entrusted to the prayers of the convent. Consolata would take upon herself the corresponding suffering that each entailed. For weeks or months on end she sometimes endured dryness of spirit, abandonment, meaninglessness, inner darkness, loneliness, doubt, and the sinful state of the priests.

She once wrote to her spiritual director during these struggles, *"How much the brothers cost me!"* Yet Jesus made her a magnificent promise, *"Consolata, it is not only one brother that you will lead back to God, but all of them. I promise you, you will give me the brothers, one after another."* And so it was! She won all the priests entrusted to her back to a fulfilling priesthood. There are recorded testimonies of many of these cases.

Berthe Petit (1870-1943)

Berthe Petit, a great mystic and expiatory soul from Belgium, has remained relatively unknown to this day. Jesus clearly indicated the priest for whom she was to give up her own plans, and providence even let them meet.

The "price" of a holy priest

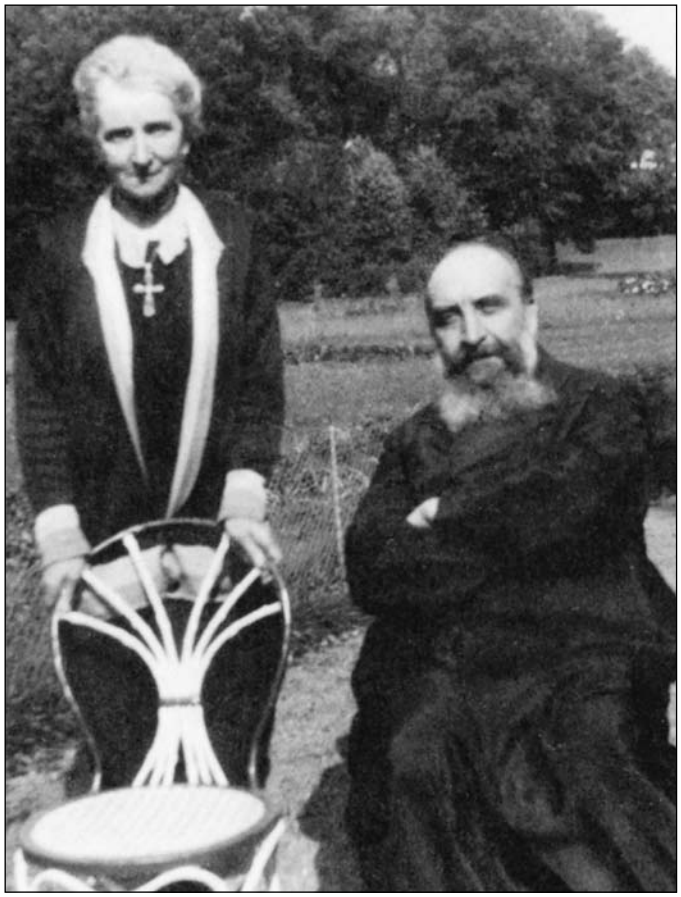
As a 15-year-old girl, Berthe started praying at every Holy Mass for the celebrant, *"My Jesus, do not allow your priests to displease you!"* When she was 17 years old, her parents lost everything they had in a failed business deal. Berthe's confessor explained to her on 8 December 1888 that her vocation was not to enter a convent but to stay at home and care for her parents. Although, she accepted this sacrifice with a heavy heart, in the church Berthe still asked Our Lady to intercede that Jesus would at least call a zealous and holy priest in the place of her religious vocation. *"You will certainly be heard!"* assured her confessor.

She could not have known what would take place just 16 days later: A 22-year-old lawyer, Dr. Louis Decorsant, was praying before a statue of the Sorrowful Mother. Unexpectedly, he had an inner certainty that it was not his vocation to take the girl he loved to be his wife and to establish himself as a notary. He understood very clearly rather, that God was calling him to be a priest. The call was so clear and urgent, that he did not hesitate for a moment to give up everything. Upon finishing his studies and his doctorate in Rome, he was ordained to the priesthood in Paris in 1893. Berthe, at the time, was 22 years old.

That same year, the newly ordained, 27-year-old priest concelebrated at the Christmas Midnight Mass in a church outside Paris. This fact is so significant because at the same time Berthe, participating at Midnight Mass in another church, solemnly promised the Lord, *"Jesus, I will be a sacrifice for the priests, for all priests, but especially for the priest of my life."*

During exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the young woman suddenly saw Jesus hanging on a large cross and Mary and John standing beneath it. Then she heard the words, *"Your offer has been accepted, your prayer heard. Behold your priest… you will be able to meet him one day."* And Berthe saw that John had the traits of a priest whom she did not know. This priest was none other than Fr. Decorsant whom she recognized at their first encounter some 15 years later in 1908.

An encounter led by God



Berthe made a pilgrimage to Lourdes where the Blessed Virgin confirmed, *"Now you will see the priest whom you asked God for 20 years ago; you will meet him soon."*

That same year, she made another trip by train to Lourdes, this time with a friend of hers. A priest got on at the station in Paris trying to find a place for a sick woman. It was Fr. Decorsant. His features were those which Berthe had seen on St. John's face 15 years earlier. She had prayed so much and offered up all of her physical suffering for him. After a couple of friendly words though, he left the compartment.

Exactly one month later, Fr. Decorsant also made a pilgrimage to Lourdes because he wanted to entrust the future of his priesthood to Our Lady. With suitcases in hand, he ran into Berthe and her friend who were still there. Recognizing the two women, he invited them to Holy Mass. When Fr. Decorsant elevated the Host, Jesus interiorly said to Berthe, *"This is the priest for whom I accepted your sacrifice."* After the Holy Mass, Berthe was surprised to see that the "priest of her life", as she called him from then on, was staying in the same hotel as they were.

A shared task

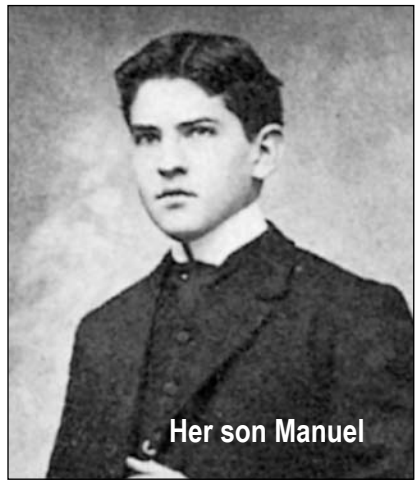
Shortly thereafter, Berthe was able to speak to him about her interior life and another mission that was entrusted to her—the promulgation of the consecration to the Immaculate and Sorrowful Heart of Mary. Fr. Decorsant felt that this precious soul had been entrusted to him by God.

He accepted a position in Belgium and became a holy spiritual director for Berthe Petit as well as an untiring support for the realization of her mission. Theologically sound, he was the ideal person to keep a correspondence between Berthe and the hierarchy of the Church in Rome. For the 24 years until his death, he accompanied Berthe Petit in her expiatory vocation; she was often very sick and suffered especially for priests who had left the priesthood.

Venerable Conchita of Mexico (1862-1937)

Maria Conception Cabrera de Armida, commonly known as Conchita, is a modern saint whom, alongside her vocation as a wife and mother, was prepared by Jesus over the course of many years to live out a unique spiritual motherhood for priests.

Conchita as a young widow



Her son Manuel

Jesus once explained to Conchita, *"There are souls, who through ordination receive a priestly anointing. However, there are ... also priestly souls who do not have the dignity or the ordination of a priest, yet have a priestly mission. They offer themselves united to me… these souls help the Church in a very powerful spiritual way. ... You will be the mother of a great number of spiritual children, yet they will cost your heart the death of a thousand martyrs."*

"Bring yourself as an offering for the priests. Unite your offering with my offering, to obtain graces for them." ... "I want to come again into this world. ... in my priests. I want to renew the world by revealing myself through the priests. I want to give my Church a powerful impulse in which I will pour out the Holy Spirit over my priests like a new Pentecost."

"The Church and the world need a new Pentecost, a priestly Pentecost, an interior Pentecost."

As a young girl, Conchita once prayed during a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, *"Lord, I feel so incapable of loving you; therefore, I want to marry. Give me many children so that they can love you more than I."* She lived a very happy marriage and gave birth to nine children—two girls and seven boys, all of whom she consecrated to Our Lady, *"I give them entirely to you as your children. You know that I am not capable of raising them. I understand too little of what it means to be a mother. But you...you know it."* She endured the death of four of her children, all of whom died in an air of sanctity.

Naturally, Conchita's spiritual motherhood was very apparent in one of her sons who became a priest. She wrote about him,

"Manuel was born in the same hour that Fr. José Camacho died. Upon hearing the news, I prayed to God that my son could replace him at the altar… When little Manuel began to talk, we prayed together for the great grace of a vocation to the priesthood… On the day of his First Holy Communion and on all the major solemnities, he renewed this prayer… At the age of 17, he joined the Society of Jesus."

Manuel, her third child, born in 1889, wrote to his mother while he was in Spain about his decision to become a priest. She wrote back to him, *"Give yourself to the Lord with all your heart, and do not hold anything back! Forget about creatures and forget especially about yourself! I cannot imagine someone consecrated to God who is not a saint. One cannot give only half of oneself to God. Be generous with him!"*

She met Manuel in Spain in 1914 for the last time because he never returned to Mexico. He wrote in a letter to her, *"My dear little mother, you have shown me the way. Fortunately, I have heard from your lips since my earliest years the challenging and saving teaching of the Cross. Now I want to put it into practice."* His mother felt the pain of separation, *"I took your letter to the tabernacle and told the Lord that I accept this sacrifice with my whole soul. The next day I was carrying your letter close to my heart when I received Holy Communion and, in this way, renewed my total offering to the Lord."*

"Mother, teach me how to be a priest!"

On 23 July 1922, one week before his ordination to the priesthood, the 33-year-old Manuel asked Conchita in a letter, *"Mother, teach me how to be a priest! Tell me about the immeasurable joy of being able to celebrate Holy Mass. I put everything back into your hands, just as when you held me to your chest as a very small child, teaching me the beautiful names of Jesus and Mary and introducing me to this mystery. I really feel like an infant asking for your light, your prayer and your sacrifice. ... As soon as I am a priest, I will send you my blessing, and then I will receive yours on my knees."*

On 31 July 1922, as Manuel was being ordained to the priesthood in Barcelona, Mother Conchita woke up in the middle of the night so that she could participate spiritually at his ordination. She was overcome by the awareness, *"I am the mother of a priest! ... I can only cry and give thanks! I invite all of heaven to give thanks in my place because I am incapable of doing it, I who am so wretched."* Ten years later, she wrote to her son, *"I cannot imagine a priest who is not Jesus, even less so in the Society of Jesus. I pray that your transformation into Christ, through celebrating Holy Mass, may help you to become Jesus day and night"* (17 May 1932). *"What would we do without the Cross? Life would be unbearable without pain; it unites, sanctifies, purifies and attains grace,"* (10 June 1932). Fr. Manuel died a holy death in 1955 at the age of 66.

The Lord enlightened Conchita regarding her apostolate, *"I will entrust to you a different martyrdom: you will suffer what the priests undertake against me. You will experience and offer up their infidelity and wretchedness."* This spiritual motherhood for the sanctification of the priests and the Church consumed her completely. Conchita died in 1937 at the age of 75.

My Priesthood and a Stranger

William Emmanuel Ketteler (1811-1877)

We all have the prayers and sacrifices of others to thank for what we are and for our vocations. In the case of the famous Bishop Ketteler, one of the leading figures of the German episcopate in the 19th century and one of the prominent founders of Catholic sociology, he owed his gratitude to a simple nun, the lowest and poorest lay sister in the convent.

The year was 1869 and a German diocesan bishop was sitting together with his guest, Bishop Ketteler from Mainz. In the course of their conversation, the diocesan bishop came to the topic of his guest's extremely blessed apostolate. Yet, Bishop Ketteler explained to his host, *"I owe thanks for everything that I have accomplished with God's help, to the prayer and sacrifice of someone I do not even know. I can only say that I know somebody has offered his or her whole life to our loving God for me, and I have this sacrifice to thank that I even became a priest."*

He continued, *"Originally, I wasn't planning on becoming a priest. I had already finished my law degree and thought only about finding an important place in the world to begin acquiring honour, prestige and wealth. An extraordinary experience held me back and directed my life down a different path.*

"One evening I was alone in my room, considering my future plans of fame and fortune, when something happened which I cannot explain. Was I awake or asleep? Did I really see it or was it just a dream? One thing I do know, it brought about a change in my life. I saw Jesus very clearly and distinctly standing over me in a radiant cloud, showing me his Sacred Heart. A nun was kneeling before him, her hands raised up in prayer. From his mouth, I heard the words, 'She prays unremittingly for you!'

"I distinctly saw the appearance of the sister, and her traits made such an impression on me that she has remained in my memory to this day. She seemed to be quite an ordinary lay sister. Her clothing was very poor and rough. Her hands were red and calloused from hard work. Whatever it was, a dream or not, it was extraordinary. It shook me to the depths of my being so that from that moment on, I decided to consecrate myself to God in the service of the priesthood.

"I withdrew to a monastery for a retreat, and I talked about everything with my confessor. Then, at the age of 30, I began studying theology. You know the rest of the story. So, if you think that I have done something admirable, now you know who really deserves the credit—a religious sister who prayed for me, maybe without even knowing who I was. I am convinced, I was prayed for and I will continue to be prayed for in secret and that without these prayers, I could never have reached the goal that God has destined for me."

"Do you have any idea of the whereabouts or the identity of who has prayed for you?" asked the diocesan bishop.

"No, I can only ask God each day that, while she is still on earth, he bless and repay her a thousand-fold for what she has done for me."

The next day, Bishop Ketteler visited a convent of sisters in a nearby city, and he celebrated Holy Mass in their chapel. He was distributing Holy Communion to the last row of sisters when one of them suddenly caught his eye. His face grew pale. He stood there, motionless… finally regaining his composure, he gave Holy Communion to the sister kneeling there in recollection, unaware of the bishop's hesitation. He then proceeded to finish the liturgy.

The bishop who had invited him the previous day came and joined him at the convent for breakfast. When they had finished, Bishop Ketteler asked the Mother Superior to present to him all the sisters in the house. Before long, she had gathered all the sisters together and both bishops went to meet them. Bishop Ketteler greeted them all but it was apparent that he did not find what he was looking for.

He quietly asked the Mother Superior, *"Are all the sisters really here?"*

She looked over the group of sisters and then said, *"Your Excellency, I called them all, but, in fact, one of them is not here."*

"Why didn't she come?"

"She works in the stall," answered the superior, *"and in such a commendable way that, in her enthusiasm, she sometimes forgets other things."*

"I would like to see that sister," requested the Bishop.

A little while later, the sister who had been summoned stepped into the room. Again Bishop Ketteler turned pale, and after a few words to all the sisters, he asked if he could be alone with the sister who had just come in.

"Do you know me?" he asked her.

"I have never seen Your Excellency before."

"Have you ever prayed for me or offered up a good deed for me?" he wanted to know.

"I do not recall that I have ever heard of Your Excellency."

The bishop was silent for a few moments and then he asked, *"Do you have a particular devotion that you like?"*

"The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," was the response.

"You have, it seems, the most difficult task in the convent," he continued.

"Oh no, Your Excellency" the sister countered, *"but I cannot lie, it is unpleasant for me."*

"And what do you do when you have such temptations against your work?"

"For things that cost me greatly, I grew accustomed to facing them with joy and enthusiasm out of love for God, and then I offer them up for one soul on earth. To whom God chooses to be gracious as a result, I have left completely up to him and I do not want to know. I also offer up my time of Eucharistic adoration every evening from 8 to 9 for this intention."

"Where did you get the idea to offer up all your merits for someone totally unknown to you?"

"I learned it while I was still out in the world," she replied. *"At school our teacher, the parish priest, taught us how we can pray and offer our merits for our relatives. Besides that, he said that we should pray much for those who are in danger of being lost. Since only God knows who really needs prayer, it is best to put your merits at the disposition of the Sacred Heart of Jesus trusting in his wisdom and omnipotence. That is what I have done,"* she concluded, *"and I always believed that God would find the right soul."*

Day of birth and day of conversion

"How old are you?" Ketteler asked.

"Thirty-three, Your Excellency," she answered.

The bishop paused a moment. Then he asked her, *"When were you born?"* The sister stated her day of birth. The bishop gasped; her birthday was the day of his conversion! Back then he saw her exactly as she was before him now. *"And have you any idea whether your prayers and sacrifices have been successful?"* he asked her further.

"No, Your Excellency."

"Don't you want to know?"

"Our dear God knows when something good happens, and that is enough," was the simple answer.

The bishop was shaken. *"So continue this work in the name of the Lord,"* he said. The sister knelt down immediately at his feet and asked for his blessing. The bishop solemnly raised his hands and said with great emotion, *"With the power entrusted to me as a bishop, I bless your soul, I bless your hands and their work, I bless your prayers and sacrifices, your self-renunciation and your obedience. I bless especially your final hour and ask God to assist you with all his consolation."* *"Amen,"* the sister answered calmly, then stood up and left.

A teaching for life

The bishop, profoundly moved, stepped over to the window in order to recompose himself. Some time later, he said good-bye to the Mother Superior and returned to the apartment of his bishop friend. He confided to him, *"Now I found the one I have to thank for my vocation. It is the lowest and poorest lay sister of that convent. I cannot thank God enough for his mercy because this sister has prayed for me for almost 20 years. On the day she first saw the light of the world, God worked my conversion accepting in advance her future prayers and works.*

"What a lesson and a reminder for me! Should I become tempted to vanity by a certain amount of success or by my good works, then I can affirm in truth: You have the prayer and sacrifice of a poor maid in a convent stall to thank. And when a small and lowly task appears of little value to me, then I will also remember the fact: what this maid does in humble obedience to God, making a sacrifice by overcoming herself, is so valuable before the Lord Our God that her merits have given rise to a bishop for the Church."

Bishop William Emmanuel Ketteler

St. Therese of Lisieux
(1873-1897)

Therese was only 14 years old when, on a pilgrimage to Rome, she understood her vocation of spiritual motherhood for priests. In her autobiography she describes that after having met many holy priests on her trip to Italy, she understood that they are weak and fragile too, in spite of their sublime dignity. *"If holy priests…show in their conduct their extreme need for prayers, what is to be said of those who are tepid?" (A 157)* In one of her letters she encouraged her sister Céline, *"Let us live for souls, let us be apostles, let us save especially the souls of priests. ...Let us pray, let us suffer for them, and, on the last day, Jesus will be grateful." (LT 94)*

In the life of Therese, Doctor of the Church, there is a moving episode which highlights her zeal to aid souls, especially those of missionaries. While she was very ill and had great difficulty walking, the nurse advised her to take a little walk for a quarter of an hour each day in the garden. She faithfully obeyed although she did not find it effective. On one occasion, the sister accompanying her noticed how painful it was for her to walk and remarked *"You would do better to rest; this walking can do you no good under such conditions. You're exhausting yourself."* The saint responded, *"Well, I am walking for a missionary. I think that over there, far away, one of them is perhaps exhausted in his apostolic endeavours, and, to lessen his fatigue, I offer mine to God."(NV)*

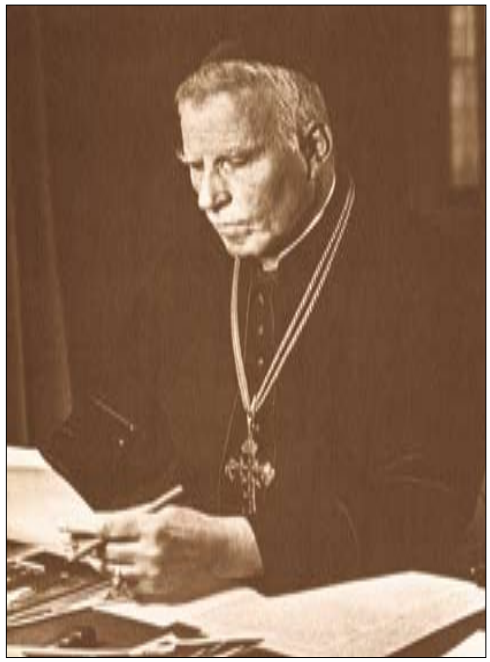
God gave a clear sign that he had accepted Therese's desire to offer her life for priests when the mother superior gave her the name of two seminarians who had asked for spiritual support from a Carmelite nun. The future Abbot Maurice Bellière was one of them; just a few days after the death of Therese, he received the habit of the "White Fathers" as a priest and missionary. Adolphe Roulland was the other seminarian whom she accompanied through her prayers and sacrifices until his ordination.

Blessed cardinal Clemens August von Galen
(1878-1946)

On 13 September 1933, the 55-year-old German priest, Clemens Count von Galen, was appointed Bishop of Munster, Germany by Pope Pius XI. In accordance with his motto he did not let himself be swayed "neither by praise nor by fear," but openly protested

the terrorist activities of the Gestapo and condemned the government for violating the rights of the Church and the faithful. In 1946, Pope Pius XII created him cardinal, because of the bravery and exceptionally courageous conviction which he had exhibited as Bishop of Munster. Upon taking the office as shepherd of Munster, Bishop Count von Galen had prayer cards printed with the following words:

"I am the thirteenth child in our family, and I will be forever thankful to my mother, who had the courage to once again say 'Yes' and thus accept the thirteenth child which God was offering her. If it had not been for my mother's 'Yes', I would not be a priest and bishop now."



Venerable Pope John Paul I
(1912-1978)

"My mother taught it to me"

Pope John Paul I began his last general audience in September of 1978 by praying an Act of Love:

"'O my God, I love You above all things with all my heart, You who are infinitely good and our eternal happiness. Out of love for You, I love my neighbour as myself and forgive any injustice which I have suffered. Lord, grant that I may love you more and more!'

"This very well-known prayer was inspired by words from the bible. My mother taught it to me, and I still pray it repeatedly throughout the day."

He spoke these words about his mother with such an affectionate tone of voice that those present in the audience hall responded with a wave of applause. A young woman in the audience said, with tears in her eyes, *"It is so touching that the Pope mentioned his mother. Now I understand better what an influence we mothers can have on our children."*

"Lord, Give Us Priests Again!"

Anna Stang endured great suffering during the Communist persecution, and like many other women in her situation, she offered it all for priests. In her old age, she too has become a woman with a priestly spirit.

"We were left without pastors!"

Anna Stang was born in 1909 to a faithful family with many children living in the German area of the Volga in Russia. She began suffering for the faith as a nine-year-old schoolgirl. She writes, *"...In 1918, in second grade, we still prayed the Our Father before class. One year later, everything was forbidden and the priest was no longer allowed in the school. People began to laugh at those of us who believed, showing no respect for the priests anymore and the seminary was destroyed."*

Anna Stang (right) and her friend Veronica

When she was 11 years old, Anna lost her father and several siblings to a Cholera epidemic, and when her mother died six years later, Anna was left to raise her younger brothers and sisters. Not only did they lose their parents, but, *"Our priest also died at this time, and many religious were arrested. So we were left without a pastor! That was so difficult. ... In the neighbouring parish, the church was still open, but there was no longer a priest there either. The faithful gathered for prayer, but without a priest, the church was very cold. I just used to cry, no longer being able to hold myself together. Earlier, this church had been filled with so much song and prayer! Everything seemed dead to me."*

Deeply afflicted by this spiritual suffering, Anna prayed from that moment on especially for priests and missionaries.

"Lord, give us another priest, give us Holy Communion! I gladly suffer everything for you, O most Sacred Heart of Jesus!" All the suffering which she endured in the following years she consciously offered for priests—even when the Communists raided their house one night in 1938 and arrested her brother and her husband to whom she had been happily married for seven years. Neither of them ever returned.

A PRIESTLY SERVICE

Anna, now a young widow, was deported with her three children to Kazachstan in 1942. *"It was hard, arriving in the bitter cold of winter, but we lived through it to see spring. In those days I cried a lot but I also prayed a lot. It was always as if somebody was leading me by the hand. Some time later, I found some Catholic women in the city of Siryanovsk. We secretly congregated on Sundays and solemnities to sing hymns and pray the Rosary. I prayed so often, 'Mary, our beloved mother, see how poor we are; send us priests, teachers and pastors again!'"*

The persecution subsided somewhat after 1965. *"A church was even built in Bishkek (the capital of Kirgizstan), and once a year my friend Veronica and I went there for Holy Mass. It was a long way, more than 1000 kilometres, but we were so happy to go. We had not seen a priest or a confessional for more than 20 years! The priest there was old and had spent 10 years in prison for his faith. While I was there, somebody lent me a key to the church allowing me to spend a long time in adoration. I never thought that I would be so close to the tabernacle again, and in my joy, I knelt down and kissed it."*

Before returning home, Anna always received permission to bring Holy Communion back to the Catholics in her city who could not make such a trip. *"With the mandate of the priest, I baptized the children and adults in my city for 30 years; I led couples to the sacrament of marriage and buried the dead until my health no longer permitted it."*

HIDDEN PRAYERS...THAT A PRIEST MIGHT COME!

You cannot imagine how thankful Anna was when a missionary priest visited her home for the first time in 1995. She cried for joy and said so movingly, *"Jesus the High Priest has come!"* At 86 years of age, she, who had prayed for decades for priests and missionaries, no longer believed she would ever see them again.

Holy Mass was celebrated for the first time in the apartment of this exceptional woman who possessed a true priestly spirit. Out of reverence and joy for the Holy Communion she had received, she ate nothing for the whole day.

A Life Offered for the Pope and the Church

At the heart of the Vatican, in the truest sense of the word, in the shadow of the dome of St. Peter's basilica, lies the convent consecrated to the "Mater Ecclesiae", Mother of the Church. This simple building, previously used for other purposes, was remodelled some years ago to fit the needs of a contemplative order. John Paul II intentionally had the inauguration date set on 13 May 1994, the anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima. In these quarters the nuns consecrate their lives for the needs of the Holy Father and the Church.

Every five years this responsibility is assumed by a different contemplative order. The first international community was composed of Poor Clares from all over the world (Italy, Canada, Russia, Bosnia, Nicaragua, and the Philippines). The Carmelites took their place and continued to offer their prayers and their lives for the intentions of the Pope. Since 7 October 2004, the Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Benedictine nuns from four different countries have come to live in the convent. One sister is from the Philippines, one from the United States, two from France and three from Italy.

Audience with the Holy Father, John Paul II in his private library on 23 December 2004

Through this initiative, John Paul II made a very clear statement to the whole world about the indispensable importance of silent prayer and hidden sacrifice for our modern and hectic world. If he wished for a cloistered convent of sisters in the immediate vicinity praying for him and his pontificate, then it also reveals his profound belief that the fruitfulness of his ministry as universal shepherd, and the spiritual success of his immense works, was due first of all to the prayers and sacrifices of others.

Pope Benedict XVI holds the same deep conviction. Many times he has gone to celebrate mass for "his sisters", thanking them for offering their lives for him. The words he addressed to the Poor Clares in Castelgondolfo on 15 September 2007 are also valid for the convent of nuns in the Vatican: *"So, dear Sisters, this is what the Pope expects of you: that you be bright torches of love, 'joined hands', watching in ceaseless prayer, totally detached from the world, in order to sustain the ministry of the One whom Jesus has called to guide his Church."* Providence would so beautifully have it, that during the pontificate of a pope who has placed himself under the patronage of St. Benedict, the sisters that are called to be especially close to him are none other than the Benedictines.

A daily, Marian life

It was not by chance that the Holy Father chose a feminine order for this task. Throughout the history of the Church, women, taking Our Lady as their model, have always been the ones to accompany and support, through prayer and sacrifice, the apostles and priests in their missionary activities. For that very reason, contemplative orders consider "the imitation and contemplation of Mary" as part of their charisma. The present prioress of the

Mother M. Sofia Cicchetti offers the Holy Father a set of mass linens hand stitched by the nuns.

convent, Madre M. Sofia Cicchetti, defines the life of her community as a daily, Marian life:

"There is nothing out of the ordinary here. You can only understand our contemplative and cloistered life in the light of faith and the love of God. In the largely consumerist, pagan society that we live, almost every sense of beauty and awe before God's great works in the world and humanity seems to have disappeared, as well as the adoration of his loving presence here in our midst. A life separated from the world, but not indifferent to it may seem absurd and useless. Nevertheless, we can joyfully say that giving our time entirely to God is not a waste. Let everyone remember a prophetic, fundamental truth: to be fully and truly human means to be anchored in God and live from the breath of God's love. Like many, we strive to be like 'Moses' with his arms lifted high and his heart wide open to the universal love, and at the same time, very concretely interceding for the good and the salvation of the world, thus becoming "collaborators in the mystery of redemption". (cf. Verbi Sponsa, 3) Our task is not based on "making" a new humanity as much as "being" a new humanity. Keeping all of this in mind, we can very well say that we have a life full of meaning and not by any means wasted or ruined. We have not closed off or run away from the world, but rather, we gladly give our lives to the God of Love and to all our brothers and sisters without exception. Here in "Mater Ecclesiae" we give it especially for the pope and his co-workers."

Sr. Clare-Christine, mother superior of the first Poor Clare community in the Vatican explains, *"Arriving here, I found the vocation of my vocation: to give my life for the Holy Father as a Poor Clare. The rest of the sisters experienced the same thing."*

Mother M. Sofia confirms, *"As Benedictines, we are very close to the Church and thus we have a great love for the Pope no matter where we are. Of course, being called to live here physically in this 'unique' convent has deepened our love even more toward him. We try to transmit this love back in the convents which we left behind to come here.*

"We know that we have been called to become spiritual mothers in our silent and hidden life. Priests and seminarians have a privileged place as our spiritual sons, as do all of those who turn to us asking for support in their priestly life and ministry, in the trials and anxieties they encounter. Our life shall be 'a witness to the apostolic efficacy of contemplative life, imitating the Blessed Virgin Mary, who stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother.'" (LG 63)