

THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY*

This yearly meeting seems to Us to be assuming extraordinary importance, because it is our meeting. Therefore it is charged with all desires, all problems and all experiences. They seek to be expressed here and to obtain judgment, comfort, guidance. Each one of you will notice that change of perspective is imposed on this discourse by a spontaneous demand connected with the present moment in the Church's life.

We will not turn Our attention to the many and far from out of date themes of Lenten preaching and preparation for Easter, which custom calls for and which are the origin and reason for this discourse. Instead, We feel obliged to reflect about the persons here present, about you, about the problem of your ministry. In this way the discourse can be a conversation: trust can give it that character, and affection can give it spirit. In other words, We feel gripped by this audience, as by something of major interest to us. Questions concerning Our clergy are at present taking precedence over those concerning the field in which they exercise their priestly and pastoral functions.

Last year We addressed Our attention to the same topic, if We remember correctly when on this occasion We spoke about the controversial sociological position of the priest in the contemporary world. And this year too, We shall only speak about what affects you directly. We certainly do not yield to this inner prompting in order to simplify what We have to say with these simple words and so lighten the burden of Our ministry. Rather We do it in order to be closer to Our responsibility and to give you proof of the place you have in Our mind and in Our charity.

* Pope Paul VI's speech to parish priests and lenten preachers of Rome in the Sistine Chapel, on February 9, 1970.

We will choose among the many themes which crowd into Our mind, and speak to you about only one thing: the spirit of community. Community spirit in this community of ours which is the diocese of Rome. There is talk of increasing it. We very willingly acknowledge that it already exists. It ought to be developed, it ought to be deepened, it ought to be the mark of spirituality, it ought to be expressed in our pastoral work, it ought to become trust, collaboration and friendship.

Outward community relationships already exist: living in the same place, belonging officially to the Church of Rome, membership of its organic, ministerial and hierarchical structure. The ecclesial community exists. But is it always at the level of perfect communion of minds, purposes and work?

Are we not sometimes solitary men in the great crowd, whereas we ought to be brothers and form a family? Do we not sometimes prefer to be isolated, to be ourselves, distinct, different, also separated, perhaps a bit dissociated and even-unfriendly, in the midst of our ecclesiastical structure? Do we really feel ourselves to be ministers united in the same ministry of Christ? Is fraternal affection always alive amongst us; does it make us humbly and holily proud of our calling to be in the ranks of the Roman clergy?

Fraternal Unity

The current revision was inspired by the Council. It raises certain problems, which are made all the more pressing by the fact that many members of different kinds come to join our diocesan community. They vary very much among themselves, by reason of differences in origin, in training, in function, and spiritual and cultural characteristics. There is need to fuse these ranks of priests, religious and Prelates, if we wish really to be a "church," that is, a congregation, a family, Christ's body, a multitude inspired with the same faith, and the same charity, as that multitude of the first believers was, "one heart and one mind" (*Acts* 4, 32).

There is no doubt that this is how Christ thought. *Unum sint* was his greatest desire (*Jn.* 17). Before he extended this messianic (cf. *Jn.* 11, 52) and divine (cf. *1 Tim.* 2, 4) desire to the whole of humanity, he expressed it directly to his disciples (*Jn.* 13, 34). Before

he asks for ecumenical unity of the Church, the Lord asks us to have fraternal, community unity in the Church. It seems to Us that one of the clearest bearing given by the recent Council is exactly that in which it brings out the communitarian nature of all mankind, especially manifested in the intentions of the supernatural divine plan (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 23-24). By virtue of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church already accomplishes this constitutional design of its Founder, but we still have a duty to work at putting into practice more and more.

Hierarchical Communion

It seems to Us that two factors come to our aid in the first effort to perfect unity and charity, that is, to achieve perfect community in priestly life. The first is the emphasis which the Council's Decree on "the ministry and the life of priests" places on the subordinate participation of the priestly Order in the mission of the Episcopal Order. This is a well-known truth, but the Council threw light upon it, in such a way that "from now on anyone who wishes to know what the priest is cannot but refer to the episcopal priesthood, in which the priest participates and shares, and to the exercise of which he is called to make a contribution" (*Presbyterium Ordinis*, nn. 2, 6, 7; Cardinal Garrone, *Le Concile*, p. 78).

Communion in the Church is hierarchical. This characteristic constitutes a stricter and more vital principle of cohesion. The second factor is a renewed and clarified notion of the solidarity which unites the priestly and the episcopal orders. That solidarity has been given back its name, *presbyterium*, and together with that name goes a structure and a function. The Council tells us that "priests, prudent cooperators with the episcopal order, as well as its aids and instruments, are called to serve the People of God. They constitute one priesthood with their bishop, although that priesthood is composed of different functions" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 28).

Some would like to see a more open and active spiritual presence arise under the form of association and the juridical form which the ecclesiastical order thus takes on. Such a spirit does not make ecclesiastical authority rise democratically from the base to the summit, nor does it try to impose arguments based on numbers, in other words, impose

plurality of opinions, so paralyzing the charismatic and responsible exercise of that authority. It aims rather at making communion and cooperation between Bishop and his priests more vital, conscientious and harmonious, and to do the same for the union of priests among themselves.

Common Pastorate

It seems to Us that the right moment has come for giving the ecclesial community spirit better awareness, greater effectiveness, especially among priests and even more so among those, whether diocesan clergy or religious, who are engaged in a pastoral ministry.

Priests have recently been elected to the Presbyteral Council here in Rome. We see importance, significance and effectiveness in this new organism. We think that Our venerated zealous Cardinal Vicar takes the same view. This group of priests should not become separated from their fellow priests; even less should it become the representative of a current of opinion that will break up the Clergy into mutually antagonistic factions. May it rather be a sign and means of concord and collaboration, solidarity and friendship amongst Our priests. May it feed that spirit of community, of unity and of charity of which We speak. We Ourselves shall be delighted to foster such fusion of minds and works to the extent that We are made aware of and approve your common aims, and give aid for your common needs.

Such spiritual and practical concord should result in a programme of combined and harmonious pastoral action ("joint pastoral work," as they say today). There will be greater saving and use of personnel, undertakings and means, and with more effective results.

Vocations to the Church

A number of matters connected with simultaneous and concerted pastoral work at once spring to Our mind. Very first in line is the question of vocations to the Church!

We do not resign Ourselves to the thought that our field of pastoral labour is barren of youthful and adult souls capable of understanding the call to the heroic service of the kingdom of God. We think that the scarcity of vocations in big cities does indeed depend to a large degree on family and social conditions, which make the consciences of new

generations unresponsive to the urging of Christ's voice; but We also trust that a priest will have the virtue, rather the grace in him to light in other souls the flame which burns in his own, the fire of love for Christ the Lord, and that he will be able to do this if he be a true priest, neither sanctimonious, nor worldly, but a priest living his priesthood with intense wisdom and sacrifice in contact with the community, especially the young.

We believe that greater attraction to embrace the ecclesiastical state will be exercised by presenting the priestly life through living it in full dedication, together with the sacred celibacy which it entails, to the sole and total love of Jesus the Master and Lord, the High and sole Redeeming Lamb, together with the complete and exclusive following of him in pastoral service to God's People. All this will have greater effect than a more natural and apparently easier formula, from the human point of view, in which dedication to Christ and self-sacrifice are no longer perfectly and sublimely linked together.

It is all a matter of understanding. This is the charism which conditions the life. Shall we doubt that the Holy Spirit will grant it to the more generous spirits in the new generation? Moral fortitude, gift of self, sacred and superhuman love for Christ, most true, most vital and most sweet love (cf. *Mt.* 19, 29), in a word, the cross accepted for one's own and others' salvation, have greater and more effective influence upon the human heart than has an invitation to take on a priesthood which has been eased by combining natural with supernatural love.

Even though there is a pressing need for vocations to the Church, We believe that transfigured and transfiguring celibacy is a better incentive to qualitative and quantitative recruitment than an easing of the canon law which prescribes celibacy firm and entire, and sets it as a seal on the loyalty and love for the kingdom of God, on the historical experience and ascetic and mystic struggle of our Latin Church. You know this, and with Us you also wish it. May you be blessed.

The Seminary

Together with the problem of vocations we must take up the problem of the Seminary, study it and solve it. The Seminary too should be more than ever before a centre of agreement for our ecclesial community, through the affection, the trust and the support which each and everyone

gives it. A tradition which must not die out has made our seminary a family circle for very many most worthy ecclesiastics who were students and teachers there — so much so that it is more a pedagogical arena than a school of knowledge.

The seminary has been and continues to be the home of our incomparable Mother, our Church, a home of affections that never die, of memories that are always green, of resolutions that have directed whole lives. So it is still and so it should ever be, through your collective, cordial loyalty. You religious, will also derive merit and benefit from it.

The Vicariate of Rome

And then, how many problems are waiting to be dealt with in the spirit of community, through more systematic and more organic thought about modern and broader solutions; problems of the clergy's finances, common life for priests, renewal of preaching, religious instruction of youth and adults, Catholic Action, new churches, assistance to poor districts, Catholic newspapers, methodical application of liturgical reform, religious chant, sacred art, spiritual exercises, and so on. The moment has come for united and vigorous relaunching of every form of apostolate, every way of exercising the ministry, every kind of pastoral care. All must set to work. All must set to work together. There are many differing instruments in the orchestra, and everyone plays his own, but the music is only one, and it must be harmony, the sum of all efforts pitched together. Our Vicariate is unfortunately seen by some as only a bureaucratic and disciplinary institution, but you can see how it can become the centre of fervour, concord, zeal and diocesan charity.

Personal Spirituality

Before ending this exhortation for an increase of community spirit, We would remind you that, as you already know, there is an intrinsic relationship between community spirit and personal spirituality, that one presupposes and fosters the other.

If increase of community spirit is not linked with intense, deep and punctual interior religiousness, we shall fall into externalism, purely sociological calculation, and legalism.

Some Comfort in Love

The apostolate would lose its interior roots and its best and original forms, together with its highest ends, if the apostle were not a man of prayer and meditation. The texture of the people educated in participation in the liturgy would lack true spiritual cohesion and true fruits from communion with the divine mysteries being celebrated, if the minister and the individual faithful themselves did not acquire a religious fervour of their own from the rite and put some of their own into it. The Church would no longer be the Church, if divine charity were not put before the practice of fraternal charity and also infused into it. This requires the soul to have a silent colloquy, listening and contemplating within itself. imploring, exultant and singing words, but its own words, secret words, perhaps comprehensible only by God, words uttered in an indescribable manner alone with the Spirit and perhaps by the Spirit himself in us: *gemitibus inenarrabilibus* (Rom. 8 26). There are no substitutes for the spiritual life. For us especially who are the Lord's ministers, it cannot, it must not be lacking.

Let us end with the following "liturgy of the word," St. Paul's words to the Philippians (2, 1-5). Sons and Brothers: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any feeling of mercy, fill up my joy by thinking alike, having the same charity, with one soul and one mind. Do nothing out of contentiousness or out of vain glory, but in humility let each regard others as better than himself, each one looking not to his own interests, but to those of others. Let this mind be in you which was also Jesus Christ."

So may it be, with Our Apostolic Blessing.
