

## "...A GREAT DEAL DEPENDS ON YOU!"

*The Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Colombo, recently delivered an address to young priests which deserves to be made the subject reflection and meditation.*

There has been talk for some years about the so-called "crisis of identity" of the priest: who is the priest? what must the priest do?

Drawing upon a very wide experience, first as superior of a seminary, then as Bishop of a diocese with two thousand priests in charge of souls in over a thousand parishes, where he is obliged to examine personal and local situations, experiences and problems of every kind, the Cardinal sets forth his views frankly and clearly in temperate terms. "The identity of the priest and of the priestly ministry cannot be a distressing problem if the solution is sought not just in the sciences of human behaviour and socio-religious statistics, but first and foremost in the Holy Spirit, in faith". In fact, some recent studies on the priest's formation, his vocation and his very life, lay too much emphasis on the psychological aspects, on human and social maturity, forgetting that this is only one aspect, which must not obscure the mysterious and supernatural side, the element of faith, which is fundamental in the priest.

### **OBEDIENCE, AVAILABILITY**

"The development of your priestly personality will, therefore, be in proportion to your real and lived configuration with Christ, in obedience, poverty and virginity". Without beating about the bush, the Cardinal of Milan, presents to his priests to his diocesan and secular clergy, the ideals of religious perfection: obedience, poverty, chastity. "The priest must be obedient to the Bishop and keep himself available his whole life

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\* *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24 August 1972.

long for any ministry and in any place, wherever the Church needs him." It almost seems the absolute language used in the liturgy of marriage for husband and wife: "in every circumstance, in every place, for the whole of life:" complete donation.

And the Cardinal goes on: "The priest must be poor. The poverty of Christ was serene and manly, never polemical, provocative and aggressive. Christ chose the life of the poor freely and out of love, in order this his preaching would be credible."

### **"A STATE OF FULLNESS"**

Thirdly, celibacy, which places him who possesses it, following the example of Christ, in a state of fullness, presence, and vibrating freshes out of a sole and undivided love for Christ, who died and rose again.

These three and ancient commitments of priestly perfection are indivisible: "Let the priest not exalt poverty, separating it from obedience and virginity, because no aspect of Christ's person can be lived to the detriment of the others".

Having held up the ideal of spiritual perfection to his diocesan clergy without any qualification or uncertainty, the Bishop of Milan, deals with equal frankness with the question: what must the priest do?

In accordance with the view of a well-known modern theologian, he states in the first place that the priest, sent to serve the people, must ask the people themselves what they want and not propose the latest novelties on his own initiative. "Let us ask ourselves what kind of priests the people expect and what they want you to do. It is our duty to be ready to accept their demands, even if the latter should upset cherished plans and preferences". In this effort of contact with the people, with their joys and sorrows, "the greatest fear of the priest", however, "must not be to lose such touch with the world," but to lose touch with the Holy Spirit." Hence the primacy of prayer, if we do not wish to add our own emptiness to the emptiness of others.

### **WORLD OF LABOUR**

In the second place: to go out to meet the world of labour well prepared with trust and liking: "you must go as priests, because you are expected as such; and you shall not yield to

the temptation of turning into trade unionists or agitators, of whom there is no lack among the workers."

In the third place: "Communion with tradition: you are not men who break with the past as if everything had to be invented from scratch; but neither are you men who are closed to the future, as if nothing should be done beyond what has always been done". Remembering that "to dig in the common furrow, and to hide one's own action in the common pastoral effort, is often more effective and lasting than to mark out new furrows, which makes one's own person conspicuous and put one's name on people's lips".

And here comes a relevant appeal in view of the multiplication of groups and grouplets, sometimes even among the clergy: "The communion of the Holy Spirit finds its main and normal ways of implementation in the parishes, dioceses, and diocesan presbyterium. . . . It cannot let itself be shut up within the limits of the group, conceived as an autonomous entity, because it is the Spirit of the Church and not of some coterie".

#### **Love for the young**

And again, love for children and the young, in youth clubs and parish associations: "Love them as they are, put up with them even in their impulsive superficiality and their contradictory behaviour, in order to educate them to become what they can and must be, in the certainty that every effort of real love will not be disappointed". Here too, without surrendering to a very recent partial opinion, the temptation and ambition of an apostolate concerned only with adults while forgetting the youth: "Let not the mirage of more urgent conquests among the adults of today deprive of your formative work the adults of tomorrow who later will not be able to be won back except bit by bit and at the cost of enormous effort".

Lastly, the careful attention for priestly vocations. Every sector of diocesan pastoral activity requires the presence and the work of a priest. "Young priests. A great deal depends on you: new vocations will arise if touched by your example".

The Cardinal concludes: "Do not be dismayed by your weakness, because the Holy Spirit loves to lower his glance on the humility of his servants".