



# The Holy See

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## CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR FOR PRIESTS

### VIGIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF PRIESTS

#### *DIALOGUE OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI* *WITH PRIESTS*

*St Peter's Square*  
*Thursday, 10 June 2010*

*Images of the celebration*

#### **America**

*Holy Father, I am Don José Eduardo Oliveira y Silva and I come from America, namely Brazil. Most of us here are committed to the parish apostolate, and not to just one community. Sometimes we pastors are in charge of several parishes or else of particularly large communities. We try our best to meet the needs of a society that has changed much, it is no longer entirely Christian, and we come to realize that our "doing" is not enough. How should we proceed, your Holiness? What direction should we take?*

Dear friends,

First of all I would like to express my great joy because gathered here are priests from all parts of the world, in the joy of our vocation and in our willingness to serve with all our strength the Lord in our time. As regards to the question, I am well aware that today it is very difficult to be a parish priest, also and above all in the countries of ancient Christianity. Parishes have become more extensive pastoral units... and it is impossible to know everyone, it is impossible to do all the work we would expect of a parish priest. So really, we are wondering how to proceed, as you said. But I

would first like to say: I know there are many parish priests in the world who really give all their strength for evangelization, for the Lord's presence and for his sacraments. And to these faithful parish priests who work with all the strength of their lives, with our being passionate for Christ, I want to say a big "thank you" at this moment. I said that it is not possible to do all we would like to do, that perhaps we should do, because our strength is limited and there are difficult situations in an increasingly diversified, more complicated society. I think that, above all, it is important that the faithful can see that the priest does not just perform a "job" with working hours, and then is free and lives only for himself, but that he is a passionate man of Christ who carries in himself the fire of Christ's love. If the faithful see that he is full of the joy of the Lord and understand also that he cannot do everything, they can accept limits and help the parish priest. This seems to me the most important point: that we can see and feel that the parish priest really feels his call from the Lord, that he is full of love for the Lord and for his faithful. If there is this, you understand and you can also see the impossibility of doing everything. So, being full of the joy of the Gospel with our whole being is the first condition. Then they must make choices, have priorities, to see what is possible and what is impossible. I would say that we know the three fundamental priorities: they are the three pillars of our being priests. First, the Eucharist, the Sacraments. The Eucharist: to make possible and present the Eucharist, above all on Sundays, for as many as possible, for everyone, and to celebrate it so that it becomes really the visible act of the Lord's love for us. Then, the Proclamation of the Word in all its dimensions: from the personal dialogue to the homily. The third point is *caritas*, the love of Christ: to be present for the suffering, for the little ones, for the children, for people in difficulty, for the marginalized; to make really present the love of the Good Shepherd. And then, a very high priority is also the personal relationship with Christ. In the Breviary, on 4 November, we read a beautiful text by St Charles Borromeo, a great shepherd, who truly gave all of himself, and says to us, to all priests, "Do not neglect your own soul. If your soul is neglected, even to others you can not give what you should give. Thus, even for yourself, for your soul, you must have time". Or, in other words, the personal colloquy with Christ, the personal dialogue with Christ is a fundamental pastoral priority in our work for the others! And prayer is not a marginal thing: it is the "occupation" of the priest to pray, as representative of the people who do not know how to pray or do not find time to pray. The personal prayer, especially the *Prayer of the Hours*, is fundamental nourishment for our soul, for all our actions. Finally, to recognize our limitations, to open ourselves up even to this humility. Recall a scene from Mark, chapter 6, where the disciples are "stressed out", they want to do everything, and the Lord says: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mk 6: 31). Even this is work I would say pastoral work: to find and to have the humility, the courage to rest. So, I think, that passion for the Lord, love for the Lord shows us the priorities, the choices, helps us to find the road. The Lord will help us. Thank you all!

### ***Africa***

*Your Holiness, I am Mathias Agnero and I come from Africa, from Côte d'Ivoire. You are a Pope-theologian, while we, when we can, just read some books on theology for formation. However, it seems to us that a rift has been created between theology and doctrine, and even more between*

*theology and spirituality. One feels the need that studies should not all be academic but nourish our spirituality. We feel the need in the same pastoral ministry. At times theology does not seem to have God and Jesus Christ at the centre as the first "theological place", but it instead has diffused tastes and trends. The consequence is the proliferation of subjective opinions permitting the introduction, even in the Church, of non-Catholic thought. How can we stay focused in our lives and in our ministry, when it is the world judging faith and not vice versa? We feel "off-centre"!*

Thank you. You touched upon a very difficult and painful problem. There is actually a theology that wants above all to be academic, to appear scientific and forgets the vital reality, the presence of God, his presence among us, his talking today not just in the past. Even St Bonaventure distinguished two forms of theology in his time and said: "There is a theology that comes from the arrogance of reason, that wants to dominate everything, God passes from being the subject to the object of our study, while he should be the subject who speaks and guides us". There is really this abuse of theology, which is the arrogance of reason and does not nurture faith but overshadows God's presence in the world. Then, there is a theology that wants to know more out of love for the beloved, it is stirred by love and guided by love. It wants to know the beloved more. And this is the true theology that comes from love of God, of Christ, and it wants to enter more deeply into communion with Christ. In reality, temptations today are great. Above all, it imposes the so-called "modern vision of the world" (Bultmann, *modernes Weltbild*), which becomes the criterion of what would be possible or impossible. And so, because of this very criterion that everything is as usual, that all historical events are of the same type, the newness of the Gospel is excluded, the irruption of God is excluded, the real news that is the joy of our faith. What should we do? I would say first to all theologians: have courage. And I would like to say a big "thank you" to the many theologians who do a good job. There are abuses, we know, but in all parts of the world there are many theologians who truly live the Word of God. They are nourished by meditation, are living the faith of the Church and want to help so that faith is present in our today. To these theologians I would like to say a big "thank you". And I would say to theologians in general: "Do not be afraid of this ghost of science!" I have been following theology since 1946. I began to study theology in January '46 and, therefore, I have seen about three generations of theologians, and I can say that the hypotheses that in that time, and then in the 1960s and 1980s, were the newest, absolutely scientific, absolutely *almost* dogmatic, have since aged and are no longer valid! Many of them seem almost ridiculous. So, have the courage to resist the apparently scientific approach, do not submit to all the hypotheses of the moment, but really start thinking from the great faith of the Church, which is present in all times and opens for us access to the truth. Above all, do not think that positivistic thinking, which excludes the transcendent that is inaccessible is true reason! This weak reasoning, which only considers things that can be experienced, is really an insufficient reasoning. We theologians must use a broader reason which is open to the greatness of God. We must have the courage to go beyond positivism to the question about the roots of being. This seems to me of great importance. Therefore, we must have the courage to use the great, broader reason and we must have the humility not to submit to all the hypotheses of the moment and to live by the great faith of the Church of all times. There is no majority against the majority of the

Saints. Saints are the true majority in the Church and we must orient ourselves by the Saints! Then, to the seminarians and priests I say the same. Do not think that Sacred Scripture is an isolated Book; it is living in the living community of the Church, which is the same subject in all ages and guarantees the presence of the Word of God. The Lord has given us the Church as a live subject with the structure of the Bishops in communion with the Pope. This great reality of the Bishops of the world in communion with the Pope guarantees to us the testimony of permanent truth. We trust this permanent Magisterium of the communion of the Bishops with the Pope, which represents to us the presence of the Word. Besides, we also trust in the life of the Church while, above all, exercising critical thought. Certainly theological formation - I would like to tell seminarians - is very important. In our time, we must know Sacred Scripture well, in order to combat the attacks of the sects. We must really be friends of the Word. We must also know the currents of our time to respond reasonably in order to give - as St Peter says - "reason for our faith". Formation is very important. But we must also be critical. The criterion of faith is the criterion with which to see also theologians and theologies. [Pope John Paul II](#) gave us an absolutely sure criterion in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here we see the synthesis of our faith, and this Catechism is truly the criterion by which we can judge whether a given theology is acceptable or not. So, I recommend the reading, the study, of this text, so we can go forward with a critical theology in the positive sense. That is critical of the trends of fashion and openness to the true news, the inexhaustible depths of the Word of God, which reveals itself anew in all times, even in our time.

### ***Europe***

*Holy Father, my name is Fr Karol Miklosko and I come from Europe, from Slovakia, and I am a missionary in Russia. When I am celebrating Mass, I find myself and I understand that there I meet my identity as well as the root and energy of my ministry. The Sacrifice of the Cross reveals to me the Good Shepherd who gives all of himself for the flock, for each sheep. And when I say: "This is my body ... this is my blood" given and poured out as a sacrifice for you, then I understand the beauty of celibacy and obedience, which I promised freely at the moment of my ordination. Despite the natural difficulties, celibacy seems obvious to me, looking at Christ. But I am stunned to read so much worldly criticism of this gift. I ask humbly, Holy Father, to enlighten us about the depth and the true meaning of ecclesiastical celibacy.*

Thank you for the two parts of your question. The first, which shows the permanent and vital foundation of our celibacy. The second, which shows all the difficulties in which we find ourselves in our times. The first part is important, i.e. the centre of our life must really be the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Central here are the words of consecration: "This is my Body, this is my Blood", which means that we speak "*in persona Christi*". Christ allows us to use his "I", we speak in the "I" of Christ. Christ is "drawing us into himself" and allows us to be united. He unites us to his "I". So, through this action, the fact that he "draws" us to himself so that our "I" becomes united to his, he realizes the permanence, the uniqueness of his Priesthood. Therefore, he is at all times

the unique Priest. Yet, he is very present to the world because he "draws" us to himself and so renders present his priestly mission. This means that we are "drawn" to the God of Christ. It is this union with his "I" which is realized in the words of the consecration. Also in the "I absolve you" because none of us could absolve from sins it is the "I" of Christ, of God, who alone can absolve. This unification of his "I" with ours implies that we are "drawn" also into the reality of his Resurrection; we are going forth towards the full life of resurrection. Jesus speaks of it to the Sadducees in Matthew, chapter 22. It is a "new" life in which we are already beyond marriage (cf. Mt 22: 23-32). It is important that we always allow this identification of the "I" of Christ with us, this being "drawn" towards the world of resurrection. In this sense, celibacy is anticipation. We transcend this time and move on. By doing so, we "draw" ourselves and our time towards the world of the resurrection, towards the newness of Christ, towards a new and true life. Therefore, celibacy is an anticipation, a foretaste, made possible by the grace of the Lord, who draws us to himself, towards the world of the resurrection. It invites us always anew to transcend ourselves and the present time, to the true presence of the future that becomes present today. And here we come to a very important point. One great problem of Christianity in today's world is that it does not think anymore of the future of God. The present of this world alone seems sufficient. We want to have only this world, to live only in this world. So we close the doors to the true greatness of our existence. The meaning of celibacy as an anticipation of the future is to open these doors, to make the world greater, to show the reality of the future that should be lived by us already as present. Living, then, as a testimony of faith: we truly believe that God exists, that God enters into my life, and that I can found my life on Christ, on the future life. And now we know the worldly criticism of which you spoke. It is true that for the agnostic world, the world in which God does not enter, celibacy is a great scandal, because it shows exactly that God is considered and experienced as reality. With the eschatological dimension of celibacy, the future world of God enters into the reality of our time. And should this disappear!?

In a certain sense, this continuous criticism against celibacy may surprise in a time when it is becoming increasingly fashionable not to get married. But this not-getting married is something totally, fundamentally different from celibacy. The avoidance of marriage is based on a will to live only for oneself, of not accepting any definitive tie, to have the life of every moment in full autonomy, to decide at any time what to do, what to take from life; and therefore a "no" to the bond, a "no" to definitiveness, to have life for oneself alone. While celibacy is just the opposite: it is a definitive "yes". It is to let oneself be taken in the hand of God, to give oneself into the hands of the Lord, into his "I". And therefore, it is an act of loyalty and trust, an act that also implies the fidelity of marriage. It is the opposite of this "no", of this autonomy that accepts no obligations, which will not enter into a bond. It is the definitive "yes" that supposes, confirms the definitive "yes" of marriage. And this marriage is the biblical form, a natural way of being man and woman, the foundation of the great Christian culture, of great cultures around the world. And if that disappears, the root of our culture will be destroyed. So celibacy confirms the "yes" of marriage with its "yes" to the future world. So, we want to go ahead and make present this scandal of a faith that bases all existence on God. We know that besides this great scandal that the world does not want to recognize, there are also the secondary scandals of our shortcomings, our sins, which obscure the

true and great scandal and make people think: "They are not really living on the foundation of God". But there is also so much loyalty! Celibacy - as its adverse criticism shows - is a great sign of faith, of the presence of God in the world. We pray to the Lord to help us, to set us free from the secondary scandals in order to make relevant the great scandal of our faith: the confidence, the strength of our life, which is founded in God and in Jesus Christ!

## **Asia**

*Holy Father, I am Fr Atsushi Yamashita and I come from Asia, from Japan. The priestly model that Your Holiness has given us this Year, the Curé of Ars, sees at the centre of our life and ministry, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Penance and personal repentance; and love for worship, worthily celebrated. I see before me signs of the rigorous poverty of St John Vianney and his passion for everything connected to worship. How can we live these fundamental aspects of our priestly life, without falling into clericalism or an estrangement from reality that the world today does not permit us?*

Thank you. So the question is how to live the centrality of the Eucharist without conducting a purely cultic life, as a stranger to the everyday life of other people. We know that clericalism is a temptation for priests in all ages, today as well. And it is even more important to find the true way to live the Eucharist, which is not closure to the world, but openness to the world's needs. We must keep in mind that in the Eucharist is realized this great drama of God who goes out of himself, leaves as said in the Letter to the Philippians his own glory, goes out and lowers himself to be one of us, even unto death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2). This is the adventure of God's love, which leaves, abandons himself to be with us - and this becomes present in the Eucharist. The great act, the great adventure of God's love is the humility of God who gives himself to us. In this sense, the Eucharist is to be considered as entering into this path of God. St Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei*, Book X: "*Hoc est sacrificium Christianorum: multi unum corpus in Christ*", i.e. the sacrifice of Christians is being united by love of Christ in the unity of the one body of Christ. The sacrifice consists precisely in going out of ourselves, in allowing entrance into the communion of the one bread, of the one Body and, therefore, to enter into the great adventure of God's love. So, we must celebrate, live and meditate always on the Eucharist, as the school of liberation from my "I": to enter into the one bread, which is the Bread of all that unites us in the one Body of Christ. Therefore, the Eucharist is, in itself, an act of love and it obliges us to this reality of love for others: that the sacrifice of Christ is the communion of all in his Body. So, this is how we must learn the Eucharist, which then is the opposite of clericalism, of closure in oneself. We think also of Mother Teresa, truly the great example in this century, at this time. A love that leaves itself, which leaves every type of clericalism, of estrangement from the world, and goes to the most marginalized, to the poorest, to those nearing death and totally gives herself up to love of the poor, the marginalized. But Mother Teresa who gave us this example and the community that follows in her steps, supposed always as the first condition of one foundation, the presence of a tabernacle. Without the presence of the love of God who gives himself, it would not have been possible to

realize that apostolate. It would not have been possible to live in that abandonment to self. Only by inserting their self-abandonment in God, in this adventure of God, this humility of God, they could and can perform today this great act of love, this openness to all. In this sense, I would say that living the Eucharist in its original sense, in its true depth, is a school of life. It is the surest protection against the temptation of clericalism.

### *Oceania*

*Most Holy Father, I am Fr Anthony Denton and I come from Oceania, from Australia. Here tonight are many priests. But we know that our seminaries are not full and that in the future, in various parts of the world, we expect a decline, even sharp. What can we do to encourage new vocations? How can we propose our way of living, all that is great and beautiful in it, to a young man of our time?*

Thank you. You too have touched upon a great and painful problem of our time: the lack of vocations, because of which local Churches are in danger of perishing, for lack of the Word of life, missing the presence of the Eucharist and other Sacraments. What's to be done? The temptation to take things into our own hands is great, the temptation to transform the priesthood - the Sacrament of Christ, to be chosen by him - into a normal profession, a "job" with specific working hours, and for the rest one belongs only to oneself. If we do so, we make it just like any other vocation; we make it accessible and easy. But this is a temptation that does not solve the problem. It reminds me of the story of Saul, the King of Israel, who before the battle against the Philistines waits for Samuel for the necessary sacrifice to God. When Samuel does not arrive at the expected time, Saul himself makes the sacrifice, although not a priest (cf. 1 Sam 13). He thought to resolve the problem, which of course he does not, because if one tries to take in hand what he cannot do, he makes himself God, or nearly so, then one cannot expect that things really go in the way of God. If we too only perform a profession like any other, giving up the sacred, the novelty, the diversity of the sacrament which only God can give, that can only come from his calling and not from our "doing", we would not solve anything. The more we should - as the Lord invites us - pray to God, knock on his door, at the heart of God, to give us vocations, to pray with great insistence, with great determination, even with great conviction. For God does not close himself to a persistent, permanent, confident prayer, even when he makes us wait, like Saul, beyond the time we expected. This seems to me the first point: to encourage the faithful to have this humility, this confidence, this courage to pray insistently for vocations, to knock at the heart of God to give us priests. In addition to this I would like to make some three points. The first: each of us should strive to live his priesthood in such a way as to be convincing. In such a manner that young people might say this is a true calling, one can live in this way, in this way one can do essential things for the world. I think that none of us would have become a priest if we had not met convincing priests who were on fire with the love of Christ. So this is the first point: Let us strive to be convincing priests. The second point is that we must invite, as I said before, people to join in prayer, to have this humility, this trust to speak to God forcefully, decisively. The third point: have the courage to talk

with young people about whether God is calling them, because often a human word is required to open one to hear to the divine call. Talk with young people and especially help them find a vital context in which they can live. Today's world is such that the maturation of a priestly vocation seems to be ruled out. Young people need environments in which to live their faith, in which to experience the beauty of faith, in which to feel that this is a way of life, "the" way of life. And help them find movements, or the parish the community in the parish or elsewhere, where they really are surrounded by faith, by God's love, and can therefore become open so that the call of God may arrive and help them. Moreover, we thank the Lord for all the seminarians of our time, for the young priests, and we pray. The Lord will help us! Thank you all!

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