On The Clergy In Brazil

Litteras A Vobis

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on July 2, 1894.

To the Archbishops and Bishops of Brazil,

Last year We received your letter joyfully announcing the addition of a new ecclesiastical province and the founding of four new bishoprics. -- This new indication of apostolic solicitude in your nation was certainly cause for rejoicing. For among the many causes of the decline of Catholicism among you, is that the number of bishops is too small for the inordinate size of the region and the unequal distribution of its inhabitants. As a result the bishops could not exercise the vigilance they desired over the clergy and the flocks entrusted to them. They were unable either to ward off the unsuitable or to promote the strength and dignity of the Catholic name. Therefore you proved your pastoral zeal when, gathered at Sao Paolo, you petitioned the Roman Pontiff to enlarge the episcopal hierarchy. We gladly agreed to grant your request. -- Now there is hope of a fruitful increase of the Christian estate, since you have more bishops; however, each one of you must apply opportune remedies to the spreading evils increasing everywhere. In this regard, We wish to recommend some useful ideas to you for increasing faith and Christian piety.

2. In the first place, let men preparing for sacred orders be taught the best things, those for which there is the greatest need and which will enable them to teach Catholic truths and to defend them strenuously against all assaults. All too often daily experience makes it plain that where the ministers lack appropriate doctrinal knowledge, their people generally suffer from ignorance of the faith and religion. For it is from the mouth of the priest that the faithful ought to learn the law: He is the angel of the Lord. For this reason we read the proclamation: the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge.[1] The Apostle too mentions knowledge among other reasons for proving himself your servant in Jesus.[2] And where this knowledge is wanting, this evil also follows for the priests: they are condemned by the people,

with God also exacting a penalty for their neglect of duty. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all people.[3] -- But the embellishment of learning and its defense never leads to their goal if they are separated from sanctity of life and morals. Indeed, knowledge without love does not build up but inflates.[4] This is the usual practice of man. Though Christ taught that learning is to be accepted from the sacred ministers without regard for any deeds of theirs which do not conform to the doctrine; nevertheless men are more influenced by what they see than by what they hear. For this reason we read the clear testimony concerning God the Savior, who was not only the teacher of shepherds but also became their model, that he began to do and to teach. Hence the priest's actions must confirm the doctrine which he preaches and commends. Before all else he who is appointed to rule a parish must not be impatient with the labor. Called to the vineyard of the Lord, let him diligently cultivate it, aware that he must render a serious account sometime for the souls entrusted to him. Nor does he labor in vain if at all times and in all matters he holds fast to learning. We must indeed fight strenuously for Christ, but only at the will and authorization of those whom Christ has chosen as leaders.

3. To form such helpers for yourselves, Venerable Brothers, is your task. Indeed experience teaches that future priests will be the kind you have taken care to form. You have the place, the sacred seminaries, where you can train ministers to your and the Church's desires as approved by God, workmen who have no need to be ashamed.[5] The very name seminary tells for what great purpose they have been erected. Therefore encourage the growth and prosperity of the ecclesiastical seminaries which you already have, both in the study of sacred learning and also in the training of souls. To ensure that this training proceeds properly, the best teachers are needed; they must not only be endowed with sound learning, but they must also teach that doctrine agreeably and faithfully according to Our precepts. In order that the young clergy become imbued with the true spirit of the Church and that they cultivate virtue, spiritual guides are to be chosen carefully. Moreover their work is to be aided and perfected with all the solicitude of your labors. But in dioceses where there are as yet no seminaries, let the bishops use every means to establish excellent ones as soon as possible. The Council of Trent has overseen this, and We have also considered it in Our apostolic letter of April 27, 1892. The freedom of education which now prevails in your country gives you greater facility to do what We have recommended with regard to the arrangement of studies. -- For this purpose you also have a great aid in the college for clerics which Pius IX labored to established for the convenience of South America and which We too have promoted and favored. Its outcome happily fulfills Our expectations. We joyfully recall that many of you have been graduated from this college. We encourage you to send young men of special promise to Rome for their studies, and you should use them appropriately afterwards as teachers or for any other purpose.

4. It is difficult to put into words the advantages for your sacred ministry that the community of religious orders will bring you. By Our Apostolic providence We have

determined to restore the original observance of their institutes from the losses of past times. To this end, We decreed on September 3, 1890, that native religious communities be subject to the authority of the bishops. -- In a matter so useful and important We trust that your cooperation will not be wanting. Pleasing results have been obtained, transacted for this purpose under the direction of Venerable Brother Jerome (Gotti), Archbishop of Petra, Internuncio of the Apostolic See to your government. In order that these beginnings may make greater progress and be brought to the desired end, We exhort you to labor diligently in this matter for religion and especially for your flocks. Meanwhile religious communities both of men and of women are to be congratulated for receiving Our commands with good will and for showing themselves ready for the restitution of each one's original institute.

5. These matters concern the proper upbringing and application of the clergy to the sacred ministry. But the needs of the faithful demand your efforts no less. In their regard, what has precedence is that children and ignorant people are properly to be taught the elements of our most holy religion; this calls for the unremitting diligence of the pastors. Then, where it is publicly permitted, instruction is to be organized for youth so that they will not be compelled to frequent the athletic facilities of heretics or attend schools where Catholic discipline is not mentioned unless to be calumniously derided, and this to the great detriment of faith and good morals. -- Besides, since minds are strengthened and stimulated by counsel and reciprocal example to do and suffer great things for religion, you will merit well on that account if you encourage and persuade laymen, especially the young, to join Christian societies. We have frequently praised them in exhortations as institutions that strive to care for the needs of religion and improve the advantages of the poor; at the same time, they diminish the appeal of those associations that abuse the title of public charity, since they are very much opposed to the welfare of Church and State. -- Also do not fail to realize how much influence for good and evil, especially in these our times, magazines and similar popular writings have acquired. Use these weapons in defense of the Christian name, with the leadership of the episcopate properly preserved and with all respect due the civil power. -- Finally all Catholics should remember that it is of the greatest concern to the Church what kind of men are elected to the legislature. Thus, preserving the rights of civil law, everyone must strive to elect those who join zeal for religion to their zeal for public affairs. This will come about more readily if each individual obeys the supreme authority governing the state and if everyone continuously advocates those things We have published not long ago in encyclical letters concerning the Christian constitution of the state.

6. For the rest, may suitable love and concord of minds flourish among you by thinking alike with one soul and one mind.[6] For this reason we strongly recommend that you share your plans frequently among yourselves and hold episcopal synods in various places to satisfy the obligations of your sacred office. You have with you the Legate of the Apostolic See, who will tell you Our mind and Our counsels. Then too, because of the paternal love with which We embrace you,

you have Us at all times ready to lend aid to your work.

7. May God very graciously grant you the gifts of His heavenly blessings, which supply the strength needed to fill the pastoral office in a holy and proper way. As a promise of these gifts, Venerable Brothers, We very lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, your clergy, and the people who have been entrusted to your care.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, July 2, 1894, in the seventeenth year of Our pontificate.

Endnotes
1. Mal 2.6.
2. 2 Cor 4.6.
3. Mal 2.9.
4. I Cor 8.1.
5. 2 Tm 2.15.
6. Phil 2.2.