



Amantissimi Redemptoris

On Priests And The Care Of Souls

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

May 3, 1858

To Our Venerable Brothers, the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, other Ordinaries who have Friendship and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Greetings and Apostolic Blessing.

Christ's love towards men was so great that not only was He willing to endure most cruel sufferings for our salvation and an atrocious death on the cross, but also He wished to nourish us eternally in the sacrament of His body and blood. In this way, He might strengthen us by the presence of His divinity and be the safest bulwark of our spiritual life. And not content to have loved us with such an outstanding and truly divine love, He heaped benefits on benefits, poured out the riches of His love upon us, and, as you know so well, having loved His own He loved them to the end. For, declaring Himself to be an eternal Priest according to the order of Melchisedech, He instituted permanently His priesthood in the Catholic Church. He decreed that that same sacrifice which He performed is to redeem the whole human race from the yoke of sin to reconcile all things in heaven and earth, and to remain until the consummation of the world. He decreed that it be renewed and take place daily by the ministry of the priesthood. Only the reason for the offering is diverse, namely, that the salvific and most abundant fruits of His passion might forever be dispersed upon mankind.

2. In the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, celebrated by priests, the same life-giving victim is offered up. This entreaty reconciles us to God the Father. It "renews in a mysterious way the death of Christ, who having risen from the dead dies no longer. Death no longer has domination over Him. Still, He is sacrificed for us in the mystery of this sacred oblation." [1]

3. No unworthiness or wickedness on the part of those offering it can ever defile this oblation. The Lord predicted through Malachy that it would be great and would be cleanly offered from sunrise to sunset in all places to His name. [2] This oblation abounding with an unspeakable richness of fruit embraces the present and future

life. For by this oblation God is pleased and, granting the grace and gift of repentance, remits even great crimes and sins. Although grievously offended by our sins, He is moved from anger to mercy, from the severity of just chastisement to clemency; by it the title and obligation of temporal punishment is dissolved; by it the souls of the departed in Christ who have not yet been fully purged are aided; by it temporal goods also are obtained, if they do not stand in the way of greater benefits; by it singular honor and cult are procured for the saints and especially for the Immaculate and most holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. Wherefore, from the apostolic tradition, we offer the divine sacrifice of the Mass "for the universal peace of the Churches; for the right disposition of the world; for rulers, soldiers, allies; those laboring with infirmity; those oppressed by afflictions; for all who are in need; for those detained in purgatory; with the belief that it will be a help to those souls for whom prayer is offered before the holy and most awesome victim lying before us." [3]

4. Nothing is greater or holier than the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, in which the body and blood of Christ are offered to God for the salvation of all. Holy Mother the Church has always been careful and diligent in order that the Mass be celebrated by priests with clean and pure hearts. It should be celebrated with the proper splendor of sacred ceremonies and rites so that the greatness of this mystery will shine forth all the more even from external appearances. This will also arouse the faithful to the contemplation of divine things hidden in such an admirable and venerable sacrifice. And with like solicitude and devotion, the same most holy Mother has never ceased to urge, exhort, and influence her faithful sons to frequently attend this divine sacrifice with due piety, veneration and devotion. She teaches that they must at all cost be present at it on all holy days of obligation, with their minds and eyes religiously intent on that from which the divine mercy and an abundance of all good things might be acquired.

5. The sacrifice of the Mass must be offered by pastors of souls for the people committed to their care; this obligation comes from a divine precept according to the teachings of the Council of Trent, since the same Council teaches in most express and grave words: "it is by divine mandate that all those to whom the care of souls is committed are to know their sheep and offer sacrifice for them." [4] The encyclical letter of Benedict XIV of 19 August 1744 [5] speaks most wisely about this obligation, explaining and confirming more fully the mind of the Fathers of Trent. In order to remove all controversies, questions, and uncertainties, he clearly declares that pastors and all others actually having the care of souls ought to offer the sacrifice of the Mass for the people committed to them on all Sundays, and holy days of obligation, as well as on those days on which he, lessening the number of holy days of obligation in some dioceses, allowed people to engage in servile work, with the provision that the faithful fulfill the obligation of hearing holy Mass.

6. We are joyful when we learn from you in your communications that those in charge of souls diligently fulfill the obligation of their office on Sundays and other

holy days of obligation, on which they rarely omit to offer the sacrifice of the Mass for the people entrusted to them. But we are not ignorant of the fact that in many places the Mass is now customarily omitted by pastors on those other days which were formerly kept as holy days of obligation according to the constitution of Our Predecessor Urban VIII.[6] Agreeing to petitions of various holy bishops and having before his eyes their causes and reasons, He lessened the holy days of obligation and not only permitted people to perform servile work, but granted also that they be exempt from the obligation of attending holy Mass. But where this generous indult of the Holy See was promulgated, straight-away the pastors of many regions, considering that they were free from the obligation of celebrating Mass for their people on these reduced holy days, neglected the obligation altogether. Hence the custom evolved that pastors in these regions stopped offering holy Mass for their people on the said days, and some did not even hesitate to defend and justify this custom.

7. We are greatly grieved by this situation; therefore, We have decided to remedy this matter especially since We are aware that this Apostolic See has taught that pastors are obliged to celebrate Mass for their people even on the reduced holy days. Our Predecessors were moved by the vigorous pleas of holy bishops; and many and varied needs of the faithful; and the grave concerns of circumstances, times, and places. As a result, they decided to lessen the number of holy days of obligation, and allowed people to undertake servile work on these days and to miss Mass. Nevertheless these same Predecessors, in granting these indults, wished that the law remain intact and inviolate. They wished that on the aforesaid days no innovation ever be made in the churches as to the customary order and rite of the divine offices. They meant for all things to be carried out the exact way they were before, while the constitution of Urban VIII was in force. This prescribed the holy days of obligation. On those days pastors are not free from the obligation of offering Mass for their people; they will realize this, especially when they recall that the pontifical rescripts are to be strictly interpreted. Moreover, We have frequently decreed, that pastors are bound by the obligation of saying Mass for their people even on those days which were removed from the number of holy days of obligation.

8. Wherefore, having weighed this matter carefully and having consulted certain Cardinals of Our Congregation for the Preservation and Interpretation of the Decrees of the Council of Trent, We have decided to write this encyclical letter to establish norm and law to be observed carefully and diligently by all pastors. Accordingly in this letter We declare that pastors and all those actually having care of souls should celebrate holy Mass for their people on all Sundays and on days of obligation. Mass must also be offered on those days, which by indult of this Holy See were removed or transferred from the number of holy days of obligation, just as the clergy were obliged to do when the constitution of Urban VIII was in full force before holy days of obligation were lessened or transferred. As for feasts which have been transferred we make one exception, namely when the divine office of a solemnity has been moved to a Sunday, only one Sunday Mass need be

offered by pastors for their people, since the Mass, being the principal part of the divine office, is considered as transferred along with the same office.

9. Concerned with the peace of soul of those pastors who, on account of the asserted custom, have omitted to offer Mass for their people on the days previously mentioned, We, by Our Apostolic authority, fully absolve them from each and every past omission. And, because some claim that they have received from this Apostolic See a special indult of reduction, We grant that they can continue to enjoy the benefit of this indult, according, however, to the conditions expressed in the indult and as long as they exercise the office of pastor in the parishes which they presently govern and administer.

10. While, however, We make these provisions and grant these indults, We hope that pastors will glory in satisfying most diligently and religiously this obligation of offering Mass for their people. They should seriously consider the rich abundance of heavenly favors and earthly goods which redound on the Christian people committed to their care from the offering of this unbloody and divine sacrifice. Since, however, we know that peculiar circumstances can arise in which a remission of the obligation for a particular reason and time should be granted to pastors, We wish to inform you that all must apply uniquely to Our Congregation of the Council to obtain this sort of indult. Only those who depend on the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith are exempted since We have given the proper faculties for this purpose to both congregations. We have no doubt that you will inform every pastor of your dioceses concerning their obligation of offering the holy sacrifice of the Mass for the people committed to them. And We are convinced also that you will apply the greatest vigilance that those in charge of souls fulfill diligently this part of their task also, and carefully observe what We have decreed and sanctioned by this encyclical. We hope that a copy of this letter will be permanently kept in the records of each of your episcopal curias.

11. Since, venerable brothers, you yourselves know full well the holy sacrifice of the Mass contains a great source of instruction for the faithful, never cease to exhort pastors especially and other preachers of the divine word and those to whom the task of educating the Christian people is delegated to explain to the faithful the necessity, excellence, greatness, purpose and fruits of so holy and admirable a sacrifice. Likewise inflame the faithful themselves to frequently attend this sacrifice with the faith, religion, and piety it deserves, that they may be able to obtain the divine mercy and all kinds of benefits they need. Nor should you cease encouraging the priests of your dioceses to be outstanding in moral integrity, dignity, innocence of life, and sanctity. Those who alone are given the privilege of consecrating the divine host and accomplishing so holy and awesome a sacrifice should display these qualities. Therefore, frequently exhort all who are initiated into the most holy priesthood to give serious consideration to the ministry which they have received in the Lord. They should fulfill their ministry, being always mindful of the dignity and heavenly power with which they are endowed; they should shine forth with the splendor of all kinds of virtue; they should occupy

themselves with divine worship, divine things, and the salvation of souls. Then, offering themselves as a living and holy host to the Lord, and always carrying about in their bodies the mortification of Jesus, they may duly offer with pure minds and clean heart to God the propitiatory host for their own salvation and that of all the world.

12. Finally, We are pleased to use this occasion also, to testify again to the special benevolence We have for you. We hope you will quickly proceed to carefully fulfill all aspects of your pastoral ministry and that you will concern yourselves with the salvation and well-being of your beloved flock.

13. Be assured that We are most ready to carry out lovingly all those things which We know can greater benefit your own and your dioceses' wellbeing. Meanwhile receive as a guarantee of all heavenly gifts and a witness of our deepest benevolence for you, the apostolic blessing, which we lovingly impart from the deepest sentiments of Our heart to you yourselves, venerable brothers, and all the clergy, and faithful laity committed to the vigilance of each of you.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 3 May 1858, in the 12th year of Our Pontificate.

Endnotes

1. St. Gregory the Great, *Dialog.*, bk. 44, chap. 58.
2. Malachy, chap. 1.
3. Sr. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 23, *Mystagogia* 5 de sacra Liturgia.
4. Council of Trent, session 23, chap. 1, *De Reformat.*
5. Benedict XIV, encyclical *Cum semper oblatas*, 19 August 1744.
6. Urban VIII, apostolic constitution *Universa per orbem*, 13 September 1642