



On The Right Ordering Of Christian Life

Exeunte Iam Anno

Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on December 25, 1888.

To the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, and Bishops, and to all the Faithful in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brothers, Beloved Sons, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

At the end of the year in which, by a singular mercy of God, We have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Our priesthood, We dwell with pleasure upon the past months, and are delighted to recall them to memory. And not without reason; for the occasion, which regarded Us in a personal manner, was of itself neither great nor extraordinary, and yet moved the goodwill of all men to a very great degree, to rejoice with and congratulate Us, so that there was nothing left to be desired.

2. This general joy was most pleasing and gratifying to Us; but what We valued therein most was the agreement of sentiment and the universal testimony to religion which it displayed. For the unanimous consent of well-wishers expressed this fact clearly, that in all places the minds and hearts of all were devoted to the Vicar of Christ, that men looked with confidence to the Apostolic See, in the midst of its misfortunes, as to an ever-springing and pure fount of salvation; and that in every land where the Catholic religion flourishes the Roman Church, mother and mistress of all Churches, is duly revered, as it should be, with one mind and heart.

3. For these reasons, through the past months, We have often lifted up our eyes to God in thanksgiving for His most gracious gift of long life, and for the consolations in Our labors which We have mentioned, and at the same time, when needful, We showed our gratitude to those to whom it was due. Now, however, the closing days of the year and of the Jubilee, bid Us renew the recollection of benefits received, and it gives us great pleasure that the whole Church joins with Us in thanksgiving.

At the same time We wish by this letter to declare publicly that so many testimonies of devotion and love have gone very far towards lightening Our burden, and the remembrance of them will live always in Our mind.

4. But a holier and higher duty yet remains. For in this devotion and eagerness to show honor to the Roman Pontiff, We acknowledge the power of God Who often is wont to draw and alone can draw great good from matters even of the smallest moment. For God, in His providence, seems to have wished to arouse faith in the midst of wrong thinking men, and to recall the Christian people to the desire of a higher life.

5. We must therefore strive diligently that after beginning well we may also end well, that the counsels of God may be both understood and put in practice. The obedience shown to the Apostolic See will then be full and perfected, if it be joined with Christian virtue, and thus lead to the salvation of souls -- the only end to be sought for, which will also abide forever. In the exercise of Our high Apostolic office, bestowed upon Us by the goodness of God, We have many times, as in duty bound, undertaken the defense of truth, and have striven to expound particularly those doctrines which seemed to be most useful to all, in order watchfully and carefully to avoid the dangers of error. But now, as a loving parent, We wish to address all Christians, and in homely words to exhort all to lead a holy life. For beyond the mere name of Christian, beyond the mere profession of faith, Christian virtues are necessary for the Christian, and upon this depends, not only the eternal salvation of their souls, but also the peace and prosperity of the human family and brotherhood.

6. If We look into the kind of life men lead everywhere, it would be impossible to avoid the conclusion that public and private morals differ much from the precepts of the Gospel. Too sadly, alas, do the words of the Apostle St. John apply to our age, "all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life." [1] For in truth, most men, with little care whence they come or whither they go, place all their thoughts and care upon the weak and fleeting goods of this life; contrary to nature and right reason they willingly give themselves up to those ways of which their reason tells them they should be the masters. It is a short step from the desire of luxury to the striving after the means to obtain it. Hence arises an unbridled greed for money, which blinds those whom it has led captive, and in the fulfillment of its passion hurries them madly along, often without regard for justice or injustice, and not seldom accompanied by a disgraceful contempt for the poverty of their neighbor. Thus many who live in the lap of luxury call themselves brethren of the multitude whom in their heart of hearts they despise; and in the same way with minds puffed up by pride, they take no thought to obey any law, or fear any power. They call selflove liberty, and think themselves "born free like a wild ass's colt." [2] Snares and temptation to sin abound; We know that impious or immoral dramas are exhibited on the stage; that books and journals are written to jeer at virtue and enoble crime; that the very arts, which were intended to give pleasure and proper

recreation, have been made to minister to impurity. Nor can We look to the future without fear, for new seeds of evil are sown, and as it were poured into the heart of the rising generation. As for the public schools, there is no ecclesiastical authority left in them, and in the years when it is most fitting for tender minds to be trained carefully in Christian virtue, the precepts of religion are for the most part unheard. Men more advanced in age encounter a yet graver peril from evil teaching, which is of such a kind as to blind the young by misleading words, instead of filling them with the knowledge of the truth. Many now-adays seek to learn by the aid of reason alone, laying divine faith entirely aside; and, through the removal of its bright light, they stumble and fail to discern the truth, teaching for instance, that matter alone exists in the world; that men and beasts have the same origin and a like nature; there are some, indeed, who go so far as to doubt the existence of God, the Ruler and Maker of the World, or who err most grievously, like the heathens, as to the nature of God. Hence the very nature and form of virtue, justice, and duty are of necessity destroyed. Thus it is that while they hold up to admiration the high authority of reason, and unduly elevate the subtlety of the human intellect, they fall into the just punishment of pride through ignorance of what is of more importance.

7. When the mind has thus been poisoned, at the same time the moral character becomes deeply and essentially corrupted; and such a state can only be cured with the utmost difficulty in this class of men, because on the one hand wrong opinions vitiate their judgment of what is right, and on the other the light of Christian faith, which is the principle and basis of all justice, is extinguished.

8. In this way We daily see the numerous ills which afflict all classes of men. These poisonous doctrines have utterly corrupted both public and private life; rationalism, materialism, atheism, have begotten socialism, communism, nihilism-evil principles which it was not only fitting should have sprung from such parentage but were its necessary offspring. In truth, if the Catholic religion is willfully rejected, whose divine origin is made clear by such unmistakable signs, what reason is there why every form of religion should not be rejected, not upheld, by such criteria of truth? If the soul is one with the body, and if therefore no hope of a happy eternity remains when the body dies, what reason is there for men to undertake toil and suffering here in subjecting the appetites to right reason? The highest good of man will then lie in enjoying life's pleasures and life's luxuries. And since there is no one who is drawn to virtue by the impulse of his own nature, every man will naturally lay hands on all he can that he may live happily on the spoils of others. Nor is there any power mighty enough to bridle the passions, for it follows that the power of law is broken, and that all authority is loosened, if the belief in an ever-living God, Who commands what is right and forbids what is wrong is rejected. Hence the bonds of civil society will be utterly shattered when every man is driven by an unappeasable covetousness to a perpetual struggle, some striving to keep their possessions, others to obtain what they desire. This is wellnigh the bent of our age.

9. There is, nevertheless, some consolation for Us even in looking on these evils,

and We may lift up Our heart in hope. For God "created all things that they might be: and He made the nations of the earth for health." [3] But as all this world cannot be upheld but by His providence and divinity, so also men can only be healed by His power, of Whose goodness they were called from death to life. For Jesus Christ redeemed the human race once by the shedding of His blood, but the power of so great a work and gift is for all ages; "neither is there salvation in any other." [4] Hence they who strive by the enforcement of law to extinguish the growing flame of lawless desire, strive indeed for justice; but let them know that they will labor with no result, or next to none, as long as they obstinately reject the power of the gospel and refuse the assistance of the Church. Thus will the evil alone be cured, by changing their ways, and returning back in their public and private life to Jesus Christ and Christianity.

10. Now the whole essence of a Christian life is to reject the corruption of the world and to oppose constantly any indulgence in it; this is taught in the words and deeds, the laws and institutions, the life and death of Jesus Christ, "the author and finisher of faith." [5] Hence, however strongly We are deterred by the evil disposition of nature and character, it is our duty to run to the "fight proposed to Us," [6] fortified and armed with the same desire and the same arms as He who, "having joy set before him, endured the cross." [7] Wherefore let men understand this specially, that it is most contrary to Christian duty to follow, in worldly fashion, pleasures of every kind, to be afraid of the hardships attending a virtuous life, and to deny nothing to self that soothes and delights the senses. "They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences" [8] -- so that it follows that they who are not accustomed to suffering, and who hold not ease and pleasure in contempt belong not to Christ. By the infinite goodness of God man lived again to the hope of an immortal life, from which he had been cut off, but he cannot attain to it if he strives not to walk in the very footsteps of Christ and conform his mind to Christ's by the meditation of Christ's example. Therefore this is not a counsel but a duty, and it is the duty, not of those only who desire a more perfect life, but clearly of every man "always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus." [9] How otherwise could the natural law, commanding man to live virtuously, be kept? For by holy baptism the sin which we contracted at birth is destroyed, but the evil and tortuous roots of sin, which sin has engrafted, and by no means removed. This part of man which is without reason -- although it cannot beat those who fight manfully by Christ's grace -- nevertheless struggles with reason for supremacy, clouds the whole soul and tyrannically bends the will from virtue with such power that we cannot escape vice or do our duty except by a daily struggle. "This holy synod teaches that in the baptized there remains concupiscence or an inclination to evil, which, being left to be fought against, cannot hurt those who do not consent to it, and manfully fight against it by the grace of Jesus Christ; for he is not crowned who does not strive lawfully." [10] There is in this struggle a degree of strength to which only a very perfect virtue, belonging to those who, by putting to flight evil passions, has gained so high a place as to seem almost to live a heavenly life on earth. Granted; grant that few attain such excellence; even the philosophy of the ancients taught that every man

should restrain his evil desires, and still more and with greater care those who from daily contact with the world have the greater temptations -- unless it be foolishly thought that where the danger is greater watchfulness is less needed, or that they who are more grievously ill need fewer medicines.

11. But the toil which is borne in this conflict is compensated by great blessings, beyond and above heavenly and eternal rewards, particularly in this way, that by calming the passions nature is largely restored to its pristine dignity. For man has been born under this law, that the mind should rule the body, that the appetites should be restrained by sound sense and reason; and hence it follows that putting a curb upon our masterful passions is the noblest and greatest freedom. Moreover, in the present state of society it is difficult to see what man could be expected to do without such a disposition. Will he be inclined to do well who has been accustomed to guide his actions by self-love alone? No man can be high-souled, kind, merciful, or restrained, who has not learnt selfconquest and a contempt for this world when opposed to virtue. And yet it must be said that it seems to have been pre-determined by the counsel of God that there should be no salvation to men without strife and pain. Truly, though God has given to man pardon for sin, He gave it under the condition that His only begotten Son should pay the due penalty; and although Jesus Christ might have satisfied divine justice in other ways, nevertheless He preferred to satisfy by the utmost suffering and the sacrifice of His life. Thus he has imposed upon His followers this law, signed in His blood, that their life should be an endless strife with the vices of the age. What made the apostles invincible in their mission of teaching truth to the world; what strengthened the martyrs innumerable in their bloody testimony to the Christian faith, but the readiness of their soul to obey fearlessly His laws? And all who have taken heed to live a Christian life and seek virtue have trodden the same path; therefore We must walk in this way if We desire either Our own salvation or that of others. Thus it becomes necessary for every one to guard manfully against the allurements of luxury, and since on every side there is so much ostentation in the enjoyment of wealth, the soul must be fortified against the dangerous snares of riches lest straining after what are called the good things of life, which cannot satisfy and soon fade away, the soul should lose "the treasure in heaven which faileth not." Finally, this is matter of deep grief, that free-thought and evil example have so evil an influence in enervating the soul, that many are now almost ashamed of the name of Christian -- a shame which is the sign either of abandoned wickedness or the extreme of cowardice; each detestable and each of the highest injury to man. For what salvation remains for such men, or on what hope can they rely, if they cease to glory in the name of Jesus Christ, if they openly and constantly refuse to mold their lives on the precepts of the gospel? It is the common complaint that the age is barren of brave men. Bring back a Christian code of life, and thereby the minds of men will regain their firmness and constancy. But man's power by itself is not equal to the responsibility of so many duties. As We must ask God for daily bread for the sustenance of the body, so must We pray to Him for strength of soul for its nourishment in virtue. Hence that universal condition and law of life, which We have said is a perpetual battle, brings with it the necessity of prayer to God.

For, as is well and wisely said by St. Augustine, pious prayer flies over the world's barriers and calls down the mercy of God from heaven. In order to conquer the emotions of lust, and the snares of the devil, lest we should be led into evil, we are commanded to seek the divine help in the words, "pray that ye enter not into temptation." [11] How much more is this necessary, if we wish to labor for the salvation of others? Christ our Lord, the only begotten Son of God, the source of all grace and virtue, first showed by example what he taught in word: "He passed the whole night in the prayer of God," [12] and when nigh to the sacrifice of his life, "He prayed the longer." [13]

12. The frailty of nature would be much less fearful, and the moral character would grow weak and enervated with much less ease if that divine precept were not so much disregarded and treated almost with disdain. For God is easily appeased, and desires to aid men, having promised openly to give His grace in abundance to those who ask for it. Nay, He even invites men to ask, and almost insists with most loving words: "I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you." [14] And that we should have no fear in doing this with confidence and familiarity, he softens His words, comparing Himself to a most loving father who desires nothing so much as the love of his children. "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?" [15] And this will not seem excessive to one who considers it, if the efficaciousness of prayer seemed so great to St. John Chrysostom that he thought it might be compared with the power of God; for as God created all things by His word, so man by prayer obtains what he wills. For nothing has so great a power as prayer, because in it there are certain qualities with which it pleases God to be moved. For in prayer we separate ourselves from things of earth, and filled with the thought of God alone, we become aware of our human weakness; for the same reason we rest in the embrace of our Father, we seek a refuge in the power of our Creator. We approach the Author of all good, as though we wish Him to gaze upon our weak souls, our failing strength, our poverty; and, full of hope, we implore His aid and guardianship, Who alone can give help to the weak and consolation to the infirm and miserable. With such a condition of mind, thinking but little of ourselves, as is fitting, God is greatly inclined to mercy, for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace. [16] Let, then, the habit of prayer be sacred to all; let soul and voice join together in prayer, and let our whole daily life agree together, so that, by keeping the laws of God, the course of our days may seem a continual ascent to Him.

13. The virtue of which we speak, like the others, is produced and nourished by divine faith; for God is the Author of all true blessings that are to be desired for themselves, as we owe to Him our knowledge of His infinite goodness, and our knowledge of the merits of our Redeemer. But, again, nothing is more fitted for the nourishment of divine faith than the pious habit of prayer, and the need of it at this time is seen by its weakness in most, and its absence in many men. For that virtue is especially the source whereby not only private lives may be amended, but also

from which a final judgment may be looked for in those matters which in the daily conflict of men do not permit states to live in peace and security. If the multitude is frenzied with a thirst for excessive liberty, if the inhuman lust of the rich never is satisfied, and if to these be added those evils of the same kind to which We have referred fully above, it will be found that nothing can heal them more completely or fully than Christian faith.

14. Here it is fitting We should exhort you whom God has made His helpers by giving the divine power to dispense His Sacraments, to turn to meditation and prayer. If the reformation of private and public morals is needed, it scarcely requires to be said that in both respects the clergy ought to set the highest example. Let them therefore remember that they have been called by Jesus Christ, "the light of the world, that the soul of the priest should shine like a light illuminating the whole world.[17] The light of learning, and that in no small degree is needed in the priest, because it is his duty, to fill others with wisdom, to destroy errors, to be a guide to the many in the steep and slippery paths of life. Learning ought to be accompanied by innocence of life, because in the reformation of man example is far better than precept. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." [18] The meaning of the divine word is that the perfection of virtue in priests should be such that they should be like a mirror to the rest of men. "There is nothing which induces others more effectively to piety and the worship of God, than the life and example of those who have dedicated themselves to the divine ministry: for, since they are separated from the world and placed in a higher sphere, others look on them as though on a mirror, to take examples from them." [19] Therefore if all men must watchfully heed against the allurements of sin, and against seeking too eagerly fleeting pleasures, it is clear how much more faithful and steadfast ought priests to be. The sacredness of their dignity, moreover -- as well as the fact that it is not sufficient to restrain their passions -- demands in them the habit of stringent selfrestraint, and also a guard over the powers of the soul, particularly the intellect and will, which hold the supreme place in man. "Thou who hast the mind to leave all (says St. Bernard), remember to reckon thyself among what thou wouldst abandon-nay, deny thyself first and before everything." Not before the soul is unshackled and free from every desire, will men have a generous zeal for the salvation of others, without which they cannot properly secure their own everlasting welfare. "There will be one thing only sought (says St. Bernard) by His subjects, one glory, one pleasure -- to make ready for the Lord a perfect people. For this they will give everything with much exertion of mind and body, with toil and suffering, with hunger and thirst, with cold and nakedness." The frequent meditation upon the things of heaven wonderfully nourishes and strengthens virtue of this kind, and makes it always fearless of the greatest difficulties for the good of others. The more pains they take to meditate well, the more clearly will they understand the greatness and holiness of the priestly office. They will understand how sad it is that so many men, redeemed by Jesus Christ, are running headlong to eternal ruin; and by meditation upon God they will be themselves encouraged, and will more effectually excite others to the love of God. Such, then, is the surest method for the salvation of all; and in this

men must take heed not to be terrified by difficulties, and not to despair of cure by reason of the long continuance of the evil. The impartial and unchangeable justice of God metes out reward for good deeds and punishment for sin. But since the life of peoples and nations, as such, does not outlast their world, they necessarily receive the rewards due to their deeds on this earth. Indeed it is no new thing that prosperity should come to a wrong-doing state; and this by the just counsel of God, Who from time to time rewards good actions with prosperity, for no people is altogether without merit, and this Augustine considered was the case with the Roman people. The law, nevertheless, is clear that for public prosperity it is to the interest of all that virtue-and justice especially, which is the mother of all virtues -- should be practiced, "Justice exalteth a nation; but sin maketh nations miserable." [20] It is not Our purpose here to consider how far evil deeds may prosper, not whether empires, when flourishing and managing matters to their own liking, do nevertheless carry about with them, as it were shut up in their bowels, the seed of ruin and wretchedness. We wish this one thing to be understood, of which history has innumerable examples, that injustice is always punished, and with greater severity the longer it has been continued. We are greatly consoled by the words of the Apostle Paul, "For all things are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." [21] By the hidden dispensation of divine providence the course of earthly things is so guided that all things that happen to man turn out to the glory of God for the salvation of those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ. Of these the mother and guide, the leader and guardian is the Church; which being united to Christ her spouse in intimate and unchangeable charity is also joined to Him by a common cause of battle and of victory. Hence We are not, and cannot be anxious on account of the Church, but We greatly fear for the salvation of very many, who proudly despise the Church, and by every kind of error rush to ruin; We are concerned for those States which We cannot but see are turned from God and sleeping in the midst of danger in dull security and insensibility. "Nothing is equal to the Church;" (says St. John Chrysostom,) "how many have opposed the Church and have themselves perished? The Church reaches to the heavens; such is the Church's greatness. She conquers when attacked; when beset by snares she triumphs; she struggles and is not overthrown, she fights and is not conquered." Not only is she not conquered, but she preserves that corrective power over nature, and that effective strength of life that springs from God Himself, and is unchanged by time. And, if by this power she has freed the world grown old in vice and lost in superstition, why should she not again recover it when gone astray? Let strife and suspicion at length cease, let all obstacles be removed, give the possession of all her rights to the Church, whose duty it is to guard and spread abroad the benefits gained by Jesus Christ, then We shall know by experience, where the light of the Gospel is, and what the power of Christ can do. 15. This year, which is now coming to an end, has given, as We have said, many signs of a reviving faith. Would that like the spark it might grow to an ever-increasing flame, which, by burning up the roots of sin, may open a way for the restoration of morals and for salutary counsels. We, indeed, who steer the mystical barque of the Church in such a storm, fix Our mind and heart upon the Divine Pilot Who holds the helm and sits unseen. Thou seest, Lord, how the winds have borne down on every side,

how the sea rages and the waves are lashed to fury. Command, we beseech Thee, Who alone canst, the winds and the sea. Give back to man that tranquillity and order-that true peace which the world cannot give. By Thy grace let man be restored to proper order with faith in God, as in duty bound, with justice and love towards our neighbor, with temperance as to ourselves, and with passions controlled by reason. Let Thy kingdom come, let the duty of submitting to Thee and serving Thee be learnt by those who, far from Thee, seek truth and salvation to no purpose. In Thy laws there is justice and fatherly kindness; Thou grantest of Thy own good will the power to keep them. The life of a man on earth is a warfare, but Thou lookest down upon the struggle and helpst man to conquer, Thou raisest him that falls, and crownest him that triumphs.[22]

16. With a mind upheld by these thoughts to cherish a joyful and firm hope, as a pledge of the favors of Heaven and of Our good-will, We most lovingly in the Lord grant to you, Venerable Brethren, and to the clergy and people of the whole Catholic world, the Apostolic blessing.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, on the birthday of Our Lord Jesus Christ; in the year 1888; the eleventh of Our Pontificate. Endnotes:

1. I Jn ii, 16.
2. Job xi, 12.
3. Wis i, 14.
4. Acts iv, 12.
5. Heb xii, 2.
6. Heb xii, 1.
7. Heb xii, 2.
8. Gal v, 24.
9. 2 Cor iv, 10.
10. Conc. Trid., sess. v, can. 5.
11. Mt xxvi, 41.
12. Lk vi, 12.
13. Lk xxii, 43.
14. Lk xi, 9.
15. Mt vii, 11.
16. I Pet v, 5.
17. St. John Chrysost. De Sac. 1, 3, c. 1.
18. Mt v, 16.
19. Conc. Trid. Sess. xxii, c. 1, de Ref.
20. Pr xiv, 34.
21. I Cor. iii, 22-23.
22. Cf. S. Aug. in Ps 32.