



## **SUPPORT PRIESTS, ESPECIALLY IN MOMENTS OF DIFFICULTY**

VATICAN CITY, 5 MAY 2010 (VIS) - In today's general audience, which was celebrated in St. Peter's Square, the Pope focused his remarks on the priest's mission to sanctify humankind.

"Sanctifying a person means putting that person in contact with God", said the Pope, noting how "an essential part of a priest's grace is his gift, his task to establish such contact. This comes about through the announcement of the Word of God, ... and particularly intensely in the Sacraments".

"Over recent decades", he went on, "various schools of thought have tried to make the aspect of announcement prevail in the priest's mission and identity, separating it from sanctification. It has often been affirmed that there is a need to go beyond merely sacramental pastoral care".

"Ordained ministers", the Pope explained, "represent Christ, God's envoy, they ... continue His mission through the 'Word' and the 'Sacrament', which are the two main pillars of priestly service". In this context he identified the need "to reflect whether, in certain cases, having undervalued the faithful exercise of 'munus sanctificandi' has not perhaps led to a weakening of faith in the salvific effectiveness of the Sacraments and, in the final analysis, in the real action of Christ and His Spirit, through the Church, in the world".

"It is, therefore, important to promote appropriate catechesis in order to help the faithful understand the value of the Sacraments. But it is equally necessary, following the example of the saintly 'Cure of Ars', to be willing, generous and attentive in giving the faithful the treasures of grace that God has placed in our hands, treasures of which we are not masters but custodians and administrators. Especially in our own time - in which on the one hand, the faith seems to be weakening and, on the other, there is a profound need and widespread search for spirituality - it is necessary for each priest to remember that ... missionary announcement and worship are never separate, and that he must promote a healthy sacramental pastoral care in order to form the People of God and help them to fully experience the liturgy ... and the Sacraments as gratuitous gifts of God, free and effective aspects of His action of salvation".

The Pope went on to highlight how "each priest knows he is a tool necessary for God's salvific action, but nonetheless just a tool. This awareness must make him humble and generous in administering the Sacraments, respecting the canonical norms but also profoundly convinced that his mission is to ensure that mankind, united to Christ, can offer itself to God as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to Him".

Addressing himself directly to priests the Holy Father encouraged them "to practice liturgy and worship with joy and love". He also renewed his call "to return to the confessional, as a place in which to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also as a place in which 'to dwell' more frequently, that the faithful may find mercy, counsel and comfort, feel themselves to be loved and understood by God, and experience the presence of Divine Mercy alongside the real presence in the Eucharist".

"I would also like to invite each priest to celebrate and to live the Eucharist intensely", said Benedict XVI. Priests "are called to be ministers of this great Mystery, in the Sacrament and in life".

Likewise, "it is indispensable to strive after the moral perfection which must dwell in each authentically priestly heart", because "there is an example of faith and a witness of sanctity that the People of God expect from their pastors".

Pope Benedict concluded by calling on the faithful "to be aware of the great gift that priests represent for the Church and the world. Through their ministry the Lord continues to save mankind, to make Himself present, to sanctify. Give thanks to God and above all remain close to your priests with prayer and support, especially in moments of difficulty, that they may increasingly become pastors in keeping with God's heart".

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