



## CONGREGATIO PRO CLERICIS

### The Year of Priesthood

Dear Priests,

The Year of Priesthood, announced by our beloved Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the saintly Curé of Ars, St. John Mary Vianney, is drawing near. It will be inaugurated by the Holy Father on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. The announcement of the Year of Priesthood has been very warmly received, especially amongst priests themselves. Everyone wants to commit themselves with determination, sincerity and fervour so that it may be a year amply celebrated in the whole world – in the Dioceses, parishes and in every local community – with the warm participation of our Catholic people who undoubtedly love their priests and want to see them happy, holy and joyous in their daily apostolic labours.

It must be a year that is both positive and forward looking in which the Church says to her priests above all, but also to all the Faithful and to wider society by means of the mass media, that she is proud of her priests, loves them, honours them, admires them and that she recognises with gratitude their pastoral work and the witness of their life. Truthfully priests are important not only for what they do but also for who they are. Sadly, it is true that at the present time some priest have been shown to have been involved in gravely problematic and unfortunate situations. It is necessary to investigate these matters, pursue judicial processes and impose penalties accordingly. However, it is also important to keep in mind that these pertain to a very small portion of the clergy. The overwhelming majority of priests are people of great personal integrity, dedicated to the sacred ministry; men of prayer and of pastoral charity, who invest their entire existence in the fulfilment of their vocation and mission, often through great personal sacrifice, but always with an authentic love towards Jesus Christ, the Church and the people, in solidarity with the poor and the suffering. It is for this reason that the Church is proud of her priests wherever they may be found.

May this year be an occasion for a period of intense appreciation of the priestly identity, of the theology of the Catholic priesthood, and of the extraordinary meaning of the vocation and mission of priests within the Church and in society. This will require opportunities for study, days of recollection, spiritual exercises reflecting on

the Priesthood, conferences and theological seminars in our ecclesiastical faculties, scientific research and respective publications.

The Holy Father, in announcing the Year in his allocution on the 16<sup>th</sup> March last to the Congregation for the Clergy during its Plenary Assembly, said that with this special year it is intended “to encourage priests in this striving for spiritual perfection on which, above all, the effectiveness of their ministry depends”. For this reason it must be, in a very special way, a year of prayer by priests, with priests and for priests, a year for the renewal of the spirituality of the presbyterate and of each priest. The Eucharist is, in this perspective, at the heart of priestly spirituality. Thus Eucharistic adoration for the sanctification of priests and the spiritual motherhood of religious women, consecrated and lay women towards priests, as previously proposed some time ago by the Congregation for the Clergy, could be further developed and would certainly bear the fruit of sanctification.

May it also be a year in which the concrete circumstances and the material sustenance of the clergy will be considered, since they live, at times, in situations of great poverty and hardship in many parts of the world.

May it be a year as well of religious and of public celebration which will bring the people – the local Catholic community – to pray, to reflect, to celebrate, and justly to give honour to their priests. In the ecclesial community a celebration is a very cordial event which expresses and nourishes Christian joy, a joy which springs from the certainty that God loves us and celebrates with us. May it therefore be an opportunity to develop the communion and friendship between priests and the communities entrusted to their care.

Many other aspects and initiatives could be mentioned that could enrich the Year of Priesthood, but here the faithful ingenuity of the local churches is called for. Thus, it would be good for every Dioceses and each parish and local community to establish, at the earliest opportunity, an effective programme for this special year. Clearly it would be important to begin the Year with some notable event. The local Churches are invited on the 19<sup>th</sup> June next, the same day on which the Holy Father will inaugurate the Year of Priesthood in Rome, to participate in the opening of the Year, ideally by some particular liturgical act and festivity. Let those who are able most surely come to Rome for the inauguration, to manifest their own participation in this happy initiative of the Pope.

God will undoubtedly bless with great love this undertaking; and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Clergy, will pray for each of you, dear priests.

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