

## THE MINISTRY OF THE DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD

The diocesan priest is a man with a definite objective to realize. That objective is the local Church, perfect in faith and in charity, to be constructed in the place where the *presbyterium* works for Christ under the direction of its episcopal father and ruler. Thus the Catholic company within which the bishop places the individual diocesan priest is, with all of its limitations and imperfections, the material out of which God wills that he should labor to construct the perfect household of God, the kind of local Church Our Lord desires in this world.

The sum of all the activity the diocesan priest must expend upon and for his people in order to carry out the commission God has given him by placing him in the *presbyterium* constitutes his sacerdotal ministry. The Catholic Church instructs us about the kinds of work that enter into the ministry of the *presbyterium* when, in the ceremony of sacerdotal ordination, the bishop states that the priest "must offer [the sacrifice of the Mass], bless, preside, preach, and baptize."<sup>1</sup> All of these activities on the part of the diocesan priest must contribute towards the edification or construction of the local Church, perfect in faith and in charity.

If, however, we consider the immediate concrete purposes to which the diocesan priest should apply the various acts of his ministry, we find that these can be classified under four headings. (1) The diocesan priest has a distinctive doctrinal ministry, since he is charged with the responsibility of instructing his people in the true faith of Jesus Christ. (2) The *presbyterium* of a local Church has a definite missionary function, since it is commissioned to "edify" a local Church well enough instructed in the faith and ardent enough in charity for those outside the Church to desire sincerely that these persons should receive fellowship with Our Lord in His *ecclesia*. (3) The unitive commission of the diocesan priesthood comes from the obligation laid upon the *presbyterium* to build the company of the faithful into family, joined within itself and to Our Lord in the bonds of mutual charity. (4) Finally the diocesan priesthood must work at its perfective function of bringing each member of the local Church to the fulness of the life of divine grace.

<sup>1</sup> *The Roman Pontifical*.

The full theological meaning and dignity of the diocesan priesthood's ministry can best be seen when we consider the activities of the *presbyterium* in terms of these four functions.

### THE REALITY OF THE SACERDOTAL OBJECTIVE

When we say that the diocesan priest is charged with the responsibility of perfecting or edifying the local Church, we do not mean to imply that the Catholic Church, in any place or at any time in this world, can be lacking in essential perfection. The basic and fundamental perfection of the Catholic Church comes from the fact that Our Lord Jesus Christ actually dwells within that society as its teacher and its ruler. Thus the Church is completely and perfectly God's kingdom on earth always. The apostolic work of the bishop and his *presbyterium* is in no way directed towards an increase in the essential perfection of the company of Our Lord's disciples.

What the bishop and the *presbyterium* seek to accomplish in the pursuance of their immediate objective is the ever more complete and perfect incorporation of the members of the local Church into Christ, their head. It is possible to have the individual member of the Catholic Church advance in the life of spiritual perfection. It is also possible to have the members as a body progress in the corporate life of charity God demands from them. The efforts of the diocesan priesthood are to be expended in this direction, and in no other.

Furthermore we must remember that in working to make his people ardent supporters of the missionary labors of the Catholic Church, the diocesan priest is in no way attempting to make the Church more Catholic or universal. The Church itself gains nothing in its *essential* Catholicity or in its *essential* holiness from the addition of new converts. The gain or benefit comes to the man who enters the communion of the *ecclesia* and thus becomes a partaker of the fellowship of Christ Our Lord. Hence it is entirely misleading to speak of the Catholic Church of our day as in some measure incomplete or lacking in Catholicity by reason of the fact that the majority of men in many races remain outside the fold. The perfect Church of Jesus Christ is able to work for God more effectively when new members are added to its company and when the members already in the communion advance in corporate and

individual perfection of faith and of charity. Nevertheless it remains true that the Church itself derives its perfection in holiness from the indwelling of Jesus Christ, and it is, as it always has been, the one and only Catholic society of the disciples.

Still less accurate is the teaching of those men who would place the perfection of the Church in some mythical "Catholic centre" or in the totality of Christianity in all ages and localities. These writers would have us believe that the Church, as it exists here and now in an individual Catholic diocese, lacks something of the inherent perfection of the Christian society. They contrast "popular Catholicism" with what they regard as the true Catholicism of their "centre" and hold that this actually existent Catholic society has deviated from the truth in approximately the same manner as the various heretical and schismatic sects. Their position is theologically absurd because, within the Catholic Church wherever it exists, Our Lord Himself lives and dwells.

#### THE DOCTRINAL MINISTRY OF THE DIOCESAN PRIEST

God wills that the local Church, like the Church Catholic as a whole, should be well established in the faith of Jesus Christ Our Lord. The local Church, as a social unit, should have an adequate grasp of the divine truths that constitute the message of the Catholic Church. The members of this local Church should be well enough instructed in these truths "to be ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that hope that is in you."<sup>2</sup> They should be able to discern teaching hostile to their own divine revealed truth, and they should be prepared to shut that hostile and erroneous teachings out of their hearts and lives. Furthermore, in their triumphant and enthusiastic orthodoxy, they should be in a position to utilize the doctrines of faith in the government of their own activity. For the local Church perfect in faith, the divinely revealed message must not and cannot be a dead letter. It must be the motive force for all of its life.

The authorized teachers of the divine faith in any local Church are the bishop and his *presbyterium*. The bishop holds this position by reason of his membership in the apostolic *collegium*. His diocesan priests are, by virtue of the divine constitution of the Church itself,

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. 3:15.

a sacerdotal brotherhood formed *unice et ex integro* for the purpose of aiding the bishop in his ministry. Together with the bishop and subject to him, the diocesan priests are responsible for the vigor and clarity of the faith in the local Church. This remains true even in a day like our own when the people have access to a great number of papers, magazines, and books, written by Catholics with the avowed intention of explaining the Church's faith. Under the leadership of the bishop, the diocesan priests are responsible before God for the spiritual enlightenment of their flocks. They can never acquit themselves of their responsibility in a manner pleasing to Our Lord by the facile process of giving a sweeping recommendation to "Catholic books" or "books by Catholics."

For the Catholic laity, reading must always be a subsidiary, though of course an important, means for acquiring a proper understanding of the Church's divine message. As a result, it will be impossible to give the people of a diocese the richness in Christ, "in all utterance and in all knowledge,"<sup>3</sup> requisite for a Church that possesses the perfection of faith demanded by God, apart from a clear and doctrinally accurate and adequate course of preaching by the members of the diocesan *presbyterium*. The preaching ministry of the diocesan priesthood must thus be directed to the accomplishment of this divinely revealed objective. It must be such as to form a local Church perfect in the faith of Jesus Christ. All that does not lead to the fashioning of the diocese into a Church perfect in faith must be excluded from the doctrinal ministry of the *presbyterium*.

The work of the diocesan priesthood to perfect the people of the local Church in the divine faith is a matter of primary importance in the Catholic Church. Other priests may be commissioned by the bishop to preach the word of God in his diocese, but no other body of men within the entire society of Our Lord's disciples is responsible for the accuracy and perfection of the faith in a local Church in the same way as the *presbyterium* of that local Church. God has formed His Church in such a way that this brotherhood, and none other, is directly charged with the task of devoting all of its energies and efforts in aiding the bishop, the divinely commissioned teacher of the local Church. The vigor and the correctness of the divine faith in any diocese is, consequently, something for

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 1:5.

which the *presbyterium* of that diocese and its members will certainly be held accountable by God.

During the course of the Church's long history, the doctrinal mission of the *presbyterium* has never been a really easy affair. It is particularly difficult in our own time. We live in an era when the disintegrating Protestantism around us for the most part acknowledges merely a symbolic or relative value in Christian dogma. During the lifetime of our own generation, this error crept into the membership of the Catholic Church itself, and Pope Pius X condemned it as one of the aspects of the chain of heresies called Modernism. It would be idle to imagine that the condemnation of Modernism, during the first decade of our century, put a stop once and for all to the influence of non-Catholic indifference to religious truth and orthodoxy upon Catholics weak or ill-instructed in their faith.

That influence exists and operates vigorously today. Our people came in contact with it through a literature and society that seem to take it for granted that all religious teaching is, in the last analysis, merely the expression of some religious sentiment. The diocesan priesthood, armed with the truth of Jesus Christ, is faced with the formidable and glorious work of realizing its divine objective of a Church perfect in faith in the midst of a world that will hardly consider the possibility of religious truth.

The individual diocesan priest accomplishes his doctrinal mission and fulfils his divinely imposed responsibilities only when he utilizes all of the resources of sacred theology to insure the accuracy and the adequacy of the instructions he is privileged to give to his people. The disciples of Christ, the members of the Catholic Church, have a God-given right to receive the teachings of their divine Master, clearly and correctly. Sacred theology is the one naturally attainable science containing this body of doctrine. The priest who fails to avail himself of this resource in preparing for his sermons to the people runs the very serious risk of misleading them about the teachings of Christ.

Obviously a great deal of genuine theological study is required for the preparation of that type of sermon which the diocesan priest is commissioned to deliver. And, what is most important, that study is required in at least as great measure when the projected sermon is to be preached to the poor as when it is to be delivered to a reputedly more cultured congregation. Riches or higher education

will never give a Catholic a right to any doctrine over and above that to which the poorest of the disciples is entitled. The type of spiritual snobbery that looks down upon instructions or sermons to the poor or to the ordinary workmen is a direct violation of the spirit and the commission of the *presbyterium*, to which, with the bishop, the poor of Christ are especially entrusted.

#### THE MISSIONARY FUNCTION OF THE DIOCESAN PRIEST

The bishop and his diocesan priests work for the formation of a spiritually prosperous Church of God in their own territory. A spiritually prosperous local Church of God is one in which the people themselves seek, with all the powers and resources at their disposal, the entrance of new members into the society of the disciples. In its Code of Canon Law, the Catholic Church commands that "Ordinaries and parish priests should consider non-Catholics resident in their own dioceses or parishes as entrusted (commendatos) to them in the Lord."<sup>4</sup> This mandate is an expression of the divine law itself. God wills that the bishop should rule his Church in the charity of Christ. It is impossible to have the love of Christ without desiring the salvation of the men and women for whom Our Lord died on Calvary. When a great many of these men and women are neighbors and fellow citizens of the bishop and of his flock, the charity of Christ manifestly demands that the bishop's *presbyterium* should do all in its power to bring these people into the company of God outside of which there is no salvation.

Since the *presbyterium* is a priestly brotherhood formed *unice et ex integro* to aid the bishop, its father and ruler, in his sacerdotal task, the *presbyterium* itself must labor for conversions to the true Church of Jesus Christ, especially among the non-Catholics of the region within which the *presbyterium* functions. The love of charity that prescribes this effort for conversions must be extended even to the bitterest enemies of the Church itself. Thus, within the confines of any local Church or diocese, there is no man to whom the bishop and his *presbyterium* are not striving to bring the blessing of heaven through membership in Christ's Church militant.

The objective of the bishop and of his diocesan priests, however, demands far more than an ardent missionary spirit in the *presby-*

<sup>4</sup> *Codex iuris canonici*, can. 1350, n. 1.

*terium* itself. They are commissioned to work for the formation or the edification of a local Church which, as a social unit, strives effectively to convert non-Catholics. The blue-print that God gives the diocesan priesthood, the description of the perfect Church, shows a people accurately instructed in Our Lord's teachings and united in ties of divine charity. When the people of a local Church, as distinct from the bishop and his *collegium* of diocesan priests, are tepid about the work of the propagation of the faith, that tepidity is an infallible indication either of ignorance in matters of faith or of a failing charity for God.

To love God sincerely is to will that He be glorified forever in the company of those who enjoy the beatific vision. To love Christ is to desire ardently that those for whom He died may rejoice always in the fruits of the redemption. Furthermore, because God actually wills that all men should serve and love Him in the Church militant, in the company of His Son on this earth, and because there is no salvation apart from the true Church of Christ, the love of God necessarily demands and desires the accomplishment of the divine will in and through the work of the missionary apostolate.

Thus, if the local Church lives ardently the life of divine grace and charity, and if it has been so instructed that the people realize the real and vital necessity of the Catholic communion, that local Church will inevitably manifest sincere enthusiasm for the missionary efforts of the *ecclesia*. If, on the other hand, it is tepid and remiss in love for God; if a considerable and influential number of its members have fallen from grace; or if the people of that Christian community are so ill-informed on matters of the faith that they have come to imagine that the work of the propagation of the faith is simply one of the many devotions within the Church which are laudable, but in no way requisite for the Church as a whole or for any individual within it, that local Church will inevitably be unenthusiastic for the work of conversion. A local Church or an individual Catholic strong in charity and enlightened by an accurate knowledge of divine revelation will, with absolute certainty, be ardently and genuinely interested in bringing men into the company of Christ within His Church.

Since charity is essentially an active thing, the enthusiasm of the well-ordered local Church for the propagation of the faith must necessarily manifest itself in sincere efforts on the part of the Catholic community as a whole, and on the part of the various indi-

viduals within that community, to do what they can to cause non-Catholics to enter the company of Christ. By the order of charity, the first beneficiaries of this love for God on the part of the local Church must inevitably be the non-Catholic people of their own locality. Certainly the local Church must pray sincerely for the conversion of these individuals, since prayer is, after all, the expression to God of our inmost and basic desires. Charity is the dominant motive in the life of grace, and since the conversion of non-Catholic neighbors is something desired in the very act of charity, those who love God will pray for this intention.

Prayer, like charity itself, is necessarily a dominant factor in the life of grace. Hence the people of God within a local Church, in praying sincerely for the spiritual well-being of their neighbors, will necessarily do everything in their power to bring the truth of Christ to those of their own neighborhood. Thus, if the local Church acts as Our Lord wills that it should, each individual within it will co-operate in the apostolic work of the propagation of the faith in prayer and in deed.

#### THE DIOCESAN PRIEST AND THE FOREIGN MISSIONS

Although the local Church is primarily interested in the conversion of its own non-Catholic neighbors, it does not and cannot limit its charitable attention to these people. Basically and essentially the local Church is a unit in the Catholic Church militant. Each Catholic in the local Church is meant to desire in charity the success of the missionary activity of the Church throughout the entire world. In those sections of the world in which the Church is not as yet perfectly and completely established, the portions of the earth not divided into individual local dioceses, the missionary activity of the Church is entirely under the direction of the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff.

The Holy Father is truly the Bishop of the Catholic Church, having true and episcopal power of jurisdiction over every one of the faithful. The universal Church of God on earth is the household or the family of Christ, over which the Bishop of Rome presides as Our Lord's vicar. Hence the members of the Church, as Christ's disciples, must be interested in the spiritual good towards their divine Master. They must desire, pray for, and, according to their

individual capacities, work for the spread of the true Church throughout the world.

Because the local Church is essentially and inherently a part of the Church universal, the objective of the diocesan priest in the individual diocese demands that he work to render his people effectively cognizant of the world-wide functions of Catholicism. Thus, despite the fact that the *presbyterium* is fashioned by God to aid the bishop in his conduct of a local Church, the orientation of the diocesan priesthood is in no way circumscribed and limited by the borders of the individual diocese. Paradoxically enough, it is precisely by reason of the fact that the ministry of the *presbyterium* is essentially diocesan that its interests and its charity must be coextensive with those of the Church Catholic. The diocese has neither meaning nor worth apart from its position in the universal Church. The man who is commissioned to act as the instrument of the bishop in caring for the local Church must, in order to do his work as Our Lord wills that it should be done, concern himself whole-heartedly and essentially with the life of the entire Church militant.

Recently there have been some theologians who have decried the movement towards a recognition of the spirituality of the diocesan priesthood on the ground that such a spirituality would be limited and un-Catholic. They have imagined that this doctrine would be a kind of *spiritualité de clocher*, tending to attach the secular priest to his own locality in such a way as to detract from his affection for and interest in the Church universal. Archbishop Guerry has assured the men troubled by such fears that there is small danger of provincialism or over-specialization within the Church coming from the diocesan ministry and its spirituality.<sup>5</sup> The men who voiced their anxiety that attention to the spirituality of the diocesan priesthood would prove in some way hostile to the unity of the Catholic Church seem not to have adverted to the theological teaching about the position of the diocese (and hence of its *presbyterium*) in the universal society of Our Lord's disciples.

Obviously the diocesan priest labors for the fostering of the missionary spirit in the people of his local Church through his sacramental ministry. The sacraments, giving divine grace *ex opere operato*, increase the perfection and the fervor of charity in the faithful who receive them, and in the Church itself. Nevertheless the

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *La Maison Dieu*, III, 81.

upbuilding of the Church, which is the work of achieving the objective of the *presbyterium*, demands a great deal of effort by the priest along lines other than those of the sacramental ministry alone. The priest must bring his people to understand the true revealed teaching on the real and vital necessity of the Catholic Church for salvation. He must bring them to recognize the requisites for membership in the true Church of Jesus Christ. Finally, he must bring them to see the meaning and the implications of divine charity itself.

Particularly in our own day, instruction along these three lines is badly needed by the Catholic people. What at any rate appears to be the most dangerous doctrinal phenomenon in modern Christendom is the tendency to play down and to underrate the importance of the true and visible Church of Jesus Christ. In the writings of some "Catholic intellectuals" this tendency results in what is for all intents and purposes an explaining away of the axiom "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*," so as to make it appear that really the Church is not necessary at all. Others, better skilled in the technique of religious writing, make the axiom itself the excuse for the crudest form of latitudinarianism by teaching that no man can be saved without actually being a member of the Church, and at the same time suggesting that, *de facto*, persons can be at the same time non-Catholics and members of Our Lord's true Church. The unfortunate Catholic who accepts this false teaching in either of the two forms mentioned will obviously not be in a position to sustain the logical and correct Catholic attitude with reference to the work of the propagation of the faith. If he has fallen into the error of believing that the visible and organized Church of the Roman communion is not really requisite for salvation, then he can not logically and consistently see in the missionary effort of the Church the supreme expression of the Church's charity for those outside of its own fold.

Likewise the people of our own time must have continual and accurate theological instruction on divine charity itself. There is an observable tendency at the present time to think of charity almost exclusively in terms of a devotional exercise, and to measure the perfection of our love for God primarily in terms of what we should do or fail to do under conditions which are not, and never will be, existent. In order that the people of God in the local Church may accomplish their mission of charity to non-Catholics through an ardent co-operation in the work of the propagation of the faith,

these people must be brought to realize that charity is essentially a dynamic thing, impelling sincere efforts for the good of those whom God calls into His kingdom, in heaven and on earth. They must be taught the truth that the ultimate and essential social effect of divine charity is an intention to work so that the men and women for whom Our Lord died may have the eternal gift of the beatific vision.

#### THE UNITIVE FUNCTION OF THE DIOCESAN PRIEST

Christ wills that His Church on earth should manifest itself for what it actually is, the family or the household of God. For that reason, time and time again, He insisted that His followers should love one another. In his various epistles St. Paul brought out the teaching of the divine Master by inculcating His command that the disciples, the members of His *ecclesia*, should hold each other in real affection. The command that the members of the Church should love one another constitutes the basic instruction in the epistles of St. John.

Our Lord also taught that we should love our enemies, and we have St. Paul's instruction to do good to all men. All of these commands, of course, are expressions of the basic and general mandate of charity, according to which the disciples of Christ are ordered to love God and to love their neighbors as themselves. Fundamentally, then, there is no reason in the world able to justify the withholding of charity from any man or woman in the world. To hate our fellow men is to cancel out and destroy the love of God in our own hearts.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as an order of charity. By the law of charity itself, we are commanded to give a special love and affection to certain persons in the world. Thus, for example, the divine precept of charity requires us to have and to show to our own families and our own neighbors a stronger, more intense, and more effective love than that which we should have for persons in no way directly connected with our own lives.

As the family or the household of God, into which we have been received as brothers by Our Lord Himself, the Catholic Church, the one society of Christ's disciples, brings its members together in a unity which, though supernatural, remains more perfect and real than the union achieved in any other way. Hence, if we are to follow out and obey God's command of charity, we must have a special

and dominant affection among ourselves as members of the Catholic Church. We must love the Church itself, and love our brothers, our fellow members of this Church, with an affection that is outstanding. If our love for the Church and for our fellow-disciples of Christ in it is not noticeably strong; if our family affection within the household of God is not powerful and manifest enough to contribute towards making the *ecclesia* a society so perfectly united in charity as to constitute an indication to the world that Christ's message is actually a divine revelation and that ours is really the company of Our Lord's followers; we are being recreant to the duties our membership in the Church has imposed upon us.

This need for a specially powerful love of charity for the Church and among Catholics is manifest from an examination of the New Testament texts about love for each other, for outsiders, and for our enemies. As Fr. Deman, O.P., points out in a brilliant article in *La vie spirituelle*, the texts that tell of the necessity of love for our enemies insist upon the incompatibility of hatred for any man with charity for God. Those, on the other hand, which deal with the necessity of mutual love and affection among the members of the society of the disciples speak of a special and most intense union of love, a true bond of family affection.<sup>6</sup>

The immediate disciples of Our Lord understood His teaching in this sense. The book of the Acts of the Apostles informs us that, directly after His ascension into heaven, the eleven apostles "were persevering with one mind in prayer, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."<sup>7</sup> After the membership in the Church had been multiplied by reason of the influx of converts on the first Christian Pentecost, we are told that the disciples "were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayers." Three times in the Pauline epistles<sup>8</sup> and twice in the letters of St. Peter,<sup>9</sup> the members of the Church are commanded and entreated to have a brotherly love (*φιλαδελφία*) for one another. In the epistle to the Romans, St. Paul begs his Christians to have this love of the

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *La vie spirituelle*, CLXXV, 5 (Dec., 1946), pp. 678 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 1:14.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:10; I Thes. 4:9; Heb. 13:1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. I Pet. 1:22; II Pet. 1:7. The word is found twice in the text of St. Peter's Second Epistle.

brotherhood make them *φιλόστοργοι*, that is, possessed of that tender affection which belongs within a family, towards one another.<sup>10</sup>

The Church of God needs building up or "edification" in any place where the need for this *φιλανδελφία* among Catholics is not recognized. Thus the objective of the diocesan priesthood in any place or time is the formation and the perfection of the Church along the lines of this love of the brotherhood. That task is rendered particularly difficult in our day by reason of the same tendency which has militated against a recognition of the real necessity and the visibility of God's Church in this world. The forces which seek to turn men away from the salvation of Christ have tried, sometimes with at least a modicum of success, to deceive Catholics into a position in which they imagine that the Church's social bonds are not very important in everyday life.

Hence we have, in our own time, the amazing spectacle of Catholic periodicals and Catholic writers protesting against what they sometimes designate as group-consciousness or group-solidarity within the true Church of Jesus Christ, and the spectacle of a Catholic author solemnly warning his readers against an excessive attachment to the real and visible Church, at the expense of that figment of the imagination he calls the invisible church. Fr. Deman has remarked the apparent prevalence, in our own time, of a tendency to exalt the love for those outside the *ecclesia* over that which is due to its own members.<sup>11</sup> We live in a time when ill-instructed but sometimes influential Catholic writers seem to burn with a desire to exalt and to exult in every good that can be found outside the visible Roman communion which alone is the Church militant of God, and to blacken and calumniate whatever they can within it.

We must not allow ourselves to forget the fact that the most important papal pronouncement of our era, the present Holy Father's *Mystici corporis*, ends in and centers around a plea to love the Church. Where this genuine and dominant love of the Church, and the sincere and effective love of Catholics for one another do not exist, the people of that local Church are not acting as God wills that they should. They are being recreant to their duties as Christians. Where the need for such *φιλανδελφία* within the Catholic Church and for it is misconstrued or denied, we have, not merely an undesir-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:10.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Deman, *loc. cit.*

able situation, but an actual error about or denial of the divine revelation itself.

Hence no aspect of the diocesan priesthood's objective is more important than the living and effective union of charity which it seeks to foster in the local Church of God. For the attainment of this objective, the *presbyterium* must have recourse to a complete and fully accurate theological instruction about the Church of Jesus Christ. The men who believe that non-Catholics should be treated with greater kindness and charity than members of the *ecclesia* suffer, in great measure, from a faulty and inadequate concept of the Church. Unless they are able to know what Our Lord revealed about the Church they will not be in a position to fulfill their obligations as members of the Church. Unless they are able to see the Church as the *ἀγάπη* there is little likelihood that they will appreciate the honor God has given them by calling them to membership within it.

When we speak of a local Church ardent in the love of the brotherhood as the objective of the diocesan priesthood, we must not lose sight of the fact that, by the command of Christ, this charity must be active and effective. Due in great measure to inferior religious teaching, there is a manifest tendency today to think of loving our brothers as a task to be accomplished solely in the process of prayer. Some people seem to imagine that a man has sufficient love for his brother if he makes no move to exempt that brother from the mass of mankind for whom his prayer is offered. The truth of the matter is that the love we are meant to have for our brothers in the Church enjoins definite and practical responsibilities. St. Peter mentioned hospitality to Christians as something intimately connected with charity in the Church.

But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves: for charity covereth a multitude of sins.

Using hospitality one towards another, without murmuring,

As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.<sup>12</sup>

Hospitality meant, in apostolic times as now, providing shelter for those who need it. There is no reason to suppose that the duty of hospitality was any easier when St. Peter wrote his epistle than it

<sup>12</sup> I Pet. 4:8-10.

is today. It required effort, and the overcoming of temptation to laziness and indifference, as St. Peter's warning against grudging hospitality would indicate. Yet the love of the brethren, without which a man is only a disloyal and recreant member of Christ's *ecclesia*, demanded that hospitality.

It is interesting to see how the inspired books of the New Testament describe this love of the brotherhood and its implications. In the first place, St. Paul insists in his Epistle to the Romans, that this affection for our fellow members of God's family requires that we should be extremely careful not to disedify or scandalize weaker brothers by our words or actions.

Let us not therefore judge one another any more. But judge this rather, that you put not a stumbling block or a scandal in your brother's way . . .

Therefore let us follow after the things that are of peace and keep the things that are of edification, one towards another . . .

It is good not to eat flesh and not to drink wine: nor any thing whereby thy brother is offended or scandalized or made weak.<sup>13</sup>

Again he writes, to the Corinthians:

But take heed lest perhaps this your liberty become a stumbling-block to the weak.

For if a man see him that hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not his conscience, being weak, be emboldened to eat those things which are sacrificed to idols?

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ hath died?

Now when you sin thus against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.<sup>14</sup>

What the people who understress the need for "group-solidarity" among the Catholics of our own day fail to appreciate is the fact that St. Paul demanded the exercise of fraternal love within the Church precisely under those circumstances in which the individual Catholic could find some sort of excuse or reason to dispense from it. The weak brothers to whom St. Paul refers in the Romans and the First Corinthians are the troublesome sort of people who would be disedified by their more intelligent fellow-Christians' performance of acts which were perfectly acceptable in themselves. Yet, on this

<sup>13</sup> Rom. 14:13, 19, 21.

<sup>14</sup> I Cor. 8:9-12.

point, the intelligent Christian is warned and commanded to govern his activities in such a way that the less perfectly instructed could come to no spiritual harm by reason of their doings.

Indeed, according to St. Paul, the Christian must be prepared to suffer real wrong from his brother. The sort of forbearance which, within the natural human family, would influence one member to suffer injury at the hands of another rather than to bring disedification and to cause dissension within the group by defending his own rights, is made mandatory within the supernatural family of God, the Catholic Church.

Already indeed there is plainly a fault among you, that you have lawsuits one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

But you do wrong and defraud: and that to your brethren.<sup>15</sup>

In the Epistle to the Colossians, the Christians are urged to continue

Bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another. Even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also.<sup>16</sup>

It is the will of God that the disciples of Jesus Christ should act justly, not only towards one another and towards the Church itself, but also towards those outside the fold. "Be without offence," St. Paul wrote to his Corinthians, "to the Jews and to the Gentiles and to the Church of God."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, according to the Apostle of the Gentiles, the Christian is expected to show himself particularly beneficent to his fellow-members of Christ's Mystical Body. "Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good to all men, but especially (*μάλιστα δε*) to those who are of the household of the faith."<sup>18</sup>

The love of the brotherhood which God commands within His own Church is essentially a positive thing. It is not fulfilled simply by the process of refraining from giving scandal to the weaker brethren, or merely by patiently accepting injuries and indignities from fellow-members of our own supernatural family. God wills that the individual local Church should consist of Christians who work together, sincerely and enthusiastically, for His glory.

<sup>15</sup> I Cor. 6:7-8.

<sup>16</sup> Col. 3:13.

<sup>17</sup> I Cor. 10:32.

<sup>18</sup> Gal. 6:10.



Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of one mind, one towards another, according to Jesus Christ:

That with one mind and with one mouth you may glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherefore, receive one another, as Christ also hath received you, unto the honor of God.<sup>19</sup>

St. Paul made it perfectly clear that the people of the local Church would please God only if they profited from the grace that came to them from Christ by manifesting a perfect unanimity of sentiment in working for Him. The diocesan *presbyterium* must work to present to God a local Church like that which St. Paul prayed the faithful at Philippi might become.

Fulfil ye my joy, that you may be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment.

Let nothing be done through contention: neither by vain glory. But in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves:

Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's.<sup>20</sup>

It is, moreover, the business of the diocesan priest to work for the spiritual edification of a local Church within which there will be no infringement of brotherly love by reason of favoring the rich and powerful over the poor. A local Church which exalts the rich at the expense of the poor sins against its divine commission.

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, with respect to persons.

For if there shall come into your assembly a man having a golden ring, in fine apparel; and there shall come in also a poor man in mean attire:

And you have respect to him that is clothed with the fine apparel and shall say to him: Sit thou here well; but say to the poor man: Stand thou there, or: Sit under my footstool:

Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts?

Hearken, my dearest brethren: Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him?<sup>21</sup>

Finally, it is God's will that the disciples of Christ should preserve themselves free from any division of charity based upon the distinc-

<sup>19</sup> Rom. 15:5-7.

<sup>20</sup> Phil. 2:2-4.

<sup>21</sup> James 2:1-5.

tion of the clergy from the laity. Thus it falls within the field of the diocesan priesthood's ministry to labor towards the eradication of any anti-clericalism which might enter into the flock of Christ. God commands that the Catholic people should have a special affection for those men who are their ministers for Christ.

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you:

That you esteem them more abundantly in charity, for their work's sake. Have peace with them.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, the formation of a local Church perfectly united in the bonds of charity constitutes a great and essential part of the ministry of the *presbyterium*. The first and the most important means the priest must use for the attainment of this end is the force of example. There will be little incentive in the direction of anti-clericalism where the priest himself manifests a sincere affection in Christ for all the members of his flock. And, where the priest shows himself completely solicitous for the spiritual welfare of all the people he is called upon to serve, he thereby makes a tremendous and unique contribution towards the formation of a local Church united in the bonds of fraternal charity. By his example in this direction, the priest becomes "a pattern of the flock from the heart."<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, in order to influence his people to love one another and to love the Church itself as God wills that they should, the priest must counteract the tendencies of the Church's enemies by giving his people an accurate and adequate instruction on the nature of divine charity and on the character of God's kingdom in this world. The people will never understand that Catholic love of the brotherhood is a part of Christian life unless they realize that the Church is actually the company or assembly within which Our Lord resides, and within which alone we may gain fellowship with Him. Furthermore, they must be made aware of the fact that the life of charity demands a real and special affection for the household of God and for its members. They should be brought to realize that the present Holy Father's encyclical, the *Mystici Corporis*, centers the divine command to love the true Church of Jesus Christ.

<sup>22</sup> I Thes. 5:12-13.

<sup>23</sup> I Pet. 5:3.

## THE PERFECTIVE FUNCTION OF THE DIOCESAN PRIEST

The objective of the Catholic episcopate, and hence of the diocesan priesthood, is a local Church composed of Christians who live the divine life of sanctifying grace in all of its perfection. Hence the ministry of the diocesan priesthood involves the effort, on the part of each member of the *presbyterium*, to influence and to bring, in so far as possible, every one of the persons subject to his ministry to the life of sanctity. The diocesan priest cannot be satisfied with his work as long as one of the faithful over whom he has been placed in charge lacks any of the supernatural perfection God wills that he should possess.

On the negative side, the ministry of the *presbyterium* in this direction involves a fight against sin, and of course against complacency in sin. In every period of the Church's history there have been certain offences against the law of God which have been particularly appealing to the fashion of the moment. Long ago, for instance, the fashion of the world opposed to Our Lord tended to consider the sin of duelling as something practically acceptable and even necessary. In our own times, such vices as "birth control" and civic dishonesty are all-too-frequently looked upon as allowable. The diocesan priest's mission to form a perfect local Church of God among his own people makes it incumbent upon him to insist upon the divinely revealed law in all of its force and perfection. It is his business to see to it that his people may never be led into complacency towards sin through any failure of his to announce the truth of God.

Furthermore, the priest must strive by every means within his power to make his own people avid for perfection in Christ. His work is incomplete as long as any one under his charge is content with laxity and imperfection in the service of Our Lord. He must make his people aware of the fact that God calls every one of them, not merely to salvation, but to the life of perfection in divine grace.

Thus the ministry God has confided to the diocesan priesthood within the Catholic Church involves accurate and adequate instruction and a great many other elements as well. The charge God has given to every member of the diocesan *presbyterium* is, in the last analysis, identical with that He gave to the young bishop, St. Timothy, by the pen of St. Paul.

I charge thee, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by his coming and his kingdom:

Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

Thus every element of exhortation and reproof must be combined with the correct and sufficient preaching of God's revealed truth to all of His people and with the administration of His sacraments in order that the God-given ministry of the diocesan priest may be accomplished in the society of the disciples of Jesus Christ Our Lord. The bishop's *presbyterium* has no other assignment in the Church of God than the completion of this ministry. The individual diocesan priest is responsible before God and obligated, by his very office, to give his life in this definite ministry for the accomplishment of the objective, the perfect local Church of God.

Finally, St. Paul's command to Timothy to "be instant, in season, out of season (*ἐπισηθι εὐκαιρως ἀκαιρως*)" is a divinely inspired reminder that the work God has imposed upon the bishop and the *presbyterium* of each local Church is definitely a full-time affair. Those who have been called by God to the apostolic life have been assigned to the most important and urgent task in the world. Because of their position in the Church, they are responsible to God Himself for the spiritual welfare of the Catholic people over whom they have been placed, and they are likewise directly charged with the duty of bringing as many people as possible into the fold of Christ. Hence there is no portion of their time that they can legitimately withdraw from the work of their ministry. The responsibility for building up the Church of God is with them always. All of the time and all of the energy and talent God has given to these His chosen servants must be expended generously and enthusiastically for the furtherance of our Lord's work in His Church. Only thus may the ministry of the diocesan priest be fulfilled.

JOSEPH CLIFFORD FENTON

*The Catholic University of America,  
Washington, D. C.*

<sup>24</sup> II Tim. 4:1-2.