

EXHORTATION

TO THE CATHOLIC CLERGY OF OUR MOST HOLY LORD.

PIUS X.,

BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE POPE,

ON THE OCCASION

OF THE FIFTIETH YEAR OF HIS PRIESTHOOD.

PIUS X., POPE.

Beloved Sons, Health and the Apostolic Benediction:

DEEMPLY impressive and full of warning are those words of the Apostle of the Gentiles to the Hebrews when, admonishing them of the duty of obedience to their superiors, he solemnly affirmed: "For they watch as being to render an account of your souls" (xiii., 17). But if this sentence applies to all who rule in the Church, it falls in a special way on us, who, unworthy as we are, have from God the supreme authority in it. Hence we are night and day full of solicitude, nor do we ever cease meditating upon and working for whatever may tend to the salvation and increase of the Lord's flock. But there is one subject that mainly occupies us: that all those in sacred orders should be completely what their state requires them to be. For we are convinced that it is principally on this that the present welfare and the future hopes of religion depend. It was on this account that immediately on entering upon the Pontificate, although taking the clergy as a whole we found many reasons for praise, we yet deemed it well to exhort most earnestly our venerable brothers, the Bishops of the whole Catholic world, to bend all their constancy and all their energy to the task of forming Christ in those who are duly destined to form Christ in others. We know well the good-will shown by the sacred prelates in this matter; we know with what foresight and diligence they strive assiduously to lead the clergy to virtue, and for this they have merited not so much praise as the open expression of our thanks.

But while we are glad that as a result of the work of the Bishops many of the clergy have been imbued with a heavenly ardor, reviving or intensifying in them the grace they received with the laying on of hands of the priesthood, there is still ground for complaint that some others in different countries do not so approve themselves that the faithful looking on them may see in them as in a mirror an example for them to imitate, as should be the case. To

such as these we wish in this letter to open our heart, as the heart of a father beating with anxious tenderness at the sight of a sick son. For this reason, therefore, we add our exhortations to the exhortations of the Bishops, premising that while they are designed principally to bring back the erring and to rouse the slothful to a better life, they may serve as a stimulus to the others. We wish to point out the way in which all may more earnestly strive every day to be in truth what the apostle has admirably described as "men of God," and answer to the just expectation of the Church. Nothing that we shall say will be entirely unfamiliar to you or new to anybody, but it will be something that should certainly be remembered by all, and God gives us the hope that our words will not be without much fruit. What we earnestly beg is: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. iv., 23, 24). And this shall be the most beautiful and acceptable gift you can offer us on the occasion of the fiftieth year of our priesthood. And while we, "in a contrite heart and in the spirit of humility" (Dan. iii., 39), go over with God the years we have passed in the priesthood, we shall be seen in a manner to expiate the human shortcomings in them that are to be lamented, admonishing you and urging you "that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing" (Coloss. i., 10). And in this appeal we shall be consulting not merely your own profit, but that of all Catholic people, for your profit cannot be separated from theirs. In truth, it is not possible for a priest to be good or bad for himself alone, for the character and life of a priest cannot but have its deep influence on the people. When a priest is good, what a great blessing it is for his surroundings!

Hence, beloved sons, we begin our exhortation by stimulating you to that holiness of life which the dignity of your rank demands of you. For the priest is not priest for himself alone, but for others: "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God" (Hebr. v., 1). Christ Himself has pointed out this truth when He explained the end for which the priest's action is destined by comparing it with that of salt and of light. The priest is the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and it must be clear to all that he is this by proclaiming the truth of Christianity. But is it not equally clear that the priesthood will be of but little use if the priest compromises by his conduct what he preaches in words? His hearers, contumeliously indeed, but not without reason, object: "They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him" (Titus i., 16); they reject the teaching and fail to profit by the light of the priest. Hence Christ Himself,

made in the form of the priests, taught first by His action, then by His words: "Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts i., 1). So, too, if sanctity is neglected, the priest cannot be in any way the salt of the earth, for what is itself corrupt and contaminated is quite unfitted for preserving soundness, and when sanctity is lacking corruption cannot but be present. Wherefore Christ, dwelling on the same similitude, calls such priests salt without savor, "good for nothing" any more but to be cast out, and therefore "to be trodden on by men" (Matth. v., 13).

All this becomes still more clear when it is remembered that we do not possess the office of the priesthood in our own name, but in that of Jesus Christ: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (I. Cor. iv., 1); "for Christ therefore we are ambassadors" (II. Cor. v., 20). It was on this account, too, that Christ numbered us not among His servants, but among His friends: "I will not now call you servants. . . . But I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard of my father I have made known to you. . . . I have chosen you and appointed you, that you may go and bear fruit" (John xv., 15). It is for us, therefore, to bear the person of Christ, and the embassy conferred by Him is to be so carried out that we may attain the aims He set for us. And since the highest sign of friendship "is to love and reject the same things" as the friend, we are bound as friends to feel within us what was also in Christ Jesus, who is "holy, innocent, undefiled" (Hebr. vii., 28). So that as His legates we must win the faith of men to His teachings and His law, by observing them first ourselves; that as partakers of His power in freeing souls from the bonds of sin, we must strive with all our strength to avoid being ourselves implicated in sin; but most of all as His ministers in the most august sacrifice, which is renewed with perennial virtue for the life of the world, we must be filled with the spirit with which He offered Himself to God, an immaculate victim, on the altar of the cross. For if so much sanctity was required of the priests of old, under appearance and in symbol, what is to be expected of us when the victim is Christ Himself? Very aptly St. Charles Borromeo in his addresses to the clergy insisted: "If we remembered, beloved brethren, how many wonderful things the Lord God has placed in our hands, what force this thought would have in impelling us to lead lives worthy of ecclesiastics! What is it that the Lord has not put in my hands when He has put in them His own only begotten Son, co-eternal and co-equal with Himself? In my hands He has put all His treasures, sacraments and graces; He has put the souls than which nothing is dearer to Him, which in His love He pre-

ferred to Himself, which He redeemed with His blood. In my hands He has placed heaven, which I can open and close to others. . . . How, therefore, can I ever be so ungrateful for such bounty and love as to sin against Him, as to offend His honor, as to soil this body which is His, as to stain this dignity, this life consecrated to Him?"

This holiness of life, of which it will be well to treat at length, the Church seeks to promote with great and constant solicitude. To this end her sacred seminaries have been instituted, where if the youths who grow up in the hope of entering the ranks of the clergy are imbued with letters and knowledge, they are also, and principally, to be formed in all piety from their tender years. When she gradually and at long intervals promotes the candidates for orders, like a good mother she never spares her exhortations on the necessity of sanctity. It is sweet to recall here these exhortations. When she first chose us for the sacred army, she willed that we should duly profess: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me" (Ps. xv., 5). By which words, says Jerome, "the cleric" is admonished "that as he is the portion of the Lord and has the Lord for his portion, so he should show himself as possessing the Lord and being possessed by the Lord" (Ep. lii., and Nepotianum). How solemnly she addresses those about to be numbered among the sub-deacons! "Again and again you should consider attentively what a great burden is that you further desire to-day . . . but if you take this order, it will be no longer lawful for you to withdraw from your determination . . . but you must serve God perpetually and with the help of His grace observe chastity." And, finally: "If hitherto you have been remiss at church, now you must be assiduous; if hitherto somnolent, now vigilant; if hitherto unclean, now chaste. . . . Remember whose ministry it is that is given to you." For those about to be advanced to the diaconate the Bishop beseeches from God: "That all virtue may abound in them, modest authority, constant modesty, the purity of innocence and the observance of spiritual discipline. Let Thy precepts shine forth in their conduct, that the people may acquire holy imitation from the example of their chastity." But far more severe is the admonition addressed to those about to be initiated in the priesthood: "With great fear is such a step to be made, and care is to be taken that heavenly wisdom, upright conduct and long observance of justice commend those who are chosen to make it. . . . Let the odor of your life be the delight of the Church of Christ, that by your preaching and example you may build up the house—that is, the family of God." And most impressive of all is that most solemn

addition: "Imitate the things wherewith you treat," which agrees perfectly with the precept of Paul: "That we may present every man perfect in Jesus Christ" (Col. i., 28).

Such being the mind of the Church on the life of priests, nobody will be surprised to find that all the Holy Fathers and doctors with one accord speak on this subject in a manner that might to some appear to be extreme; but if we weigh their words carefully, we shall find that what they teach is most true and right. Their opinion may be summed up thus: Between the priest and any upright man there should be as much difference as there is between heaven and earth, and for this same reason priestly virtue must shun not only graver sins, but even the slightest. The Council of Trent held by the judgment of those venerable men when it admonished clerics to avoid "even light faults as being in them most serious" (Sess. XXII., de reform., c. I.); most serious, that is, not in themselves, but by reason of the person who commits them, of whom with better right than of material temples it may be said: "Holiness becomes Thy house" (Ps. xcii., 5).

And now let us see in what consists this sanctity which should not be lacking in the priest, for if a man is ignorant of this or misunderstands it he is certainly in great danger. For there are those who think, nay, proclaim aloud, that the merit of a priest should consist in the fact that he is entirely occupied in working for others, so that paying but little heed to the virtues by which a man is perfected himself (and which they thus call "passive" virtues) they proclaim that all a man's strength and zeal should be put forth in fostering and exercising the "active" virtues. This teaching is utterly fallacious and destructive, and concerning it our predecessor of happy memory in his wisdom thus pronounced concerning it (Testem benevolentiae, ad episc. Baltimor., 22 Jan., 1899): "That some of the Christian virtues were meant for other times can only be held by one who fails to remember the words of the apostle: 'Whom he foreknew he also made destined to be conformable to the image of His Son.' The teacher and exemplar of all sanctity is Christ, and upon His rule are to be modeled all who wish to have a place among the blessed. Now, Christ does not change with the progress of ages, but 'is the same' yesterday, to-day and forever (Hebr. xiii., 8). To men of all times, therefore, are applicable the words: 'Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart' (Matth. xi., 29); and there is no time when Christ does not show Himself forth to us 'having become obedient unto death' (Phill. ii., 8); and to every age belongs the sentence of the apostle: 'They who are of Christ have crucified their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences' (Gal. v., 24)." And these quotations, while applying to every one

of the faithful, refer more specially to priests, who should also, above others, take to themselves what our predecessor, with apostolic zeal, proceeds to add: "Would that these virtues were now practiced by many more in our times as they were practiced by those most holy men of former ages, who in their humility, obedience and abstinence were 'powerful in their works and words,' to the great advantage not only of religion, but of civil society." Here it is well to observe that the most prudent Pontiff rightly makes special mention of abstinence, which, in the language of the Gospel, we call self-denial. Truly, beloved sons, under this head is contained the strength and virtue and all the fruit of the sacerdotal office: this neglected, the way is opened for everything that is capable of offending the eyes and souls of the people in the life of a priest. For if a man works for filthy lucre, if he mixes himself with the affairs of the world, if he seeks after the first places and despises the others, if he yields to flesh and blood, if he strives to please men, if he puts his trust in the plausible words of human wisdom—all this happens because he neglects the commandment of Christ and rejects the condition laid down by Him: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself" (Matth. xv., 24).

But while we inculcate this truth, we none the less admonish the priest that not for himself alone is he to live a holy life, for he is the "workman whom Christ went out to bring into His vineyard" (Matth. xx., 1). It is for him, therefore, to pluck up fallacious plants, to sow useful ones, to water the ground, to watch lest the enemy sow tares. Hence the priest must take care not to be led by a species of misguided zeal for his own private perfection to omit any part of his office for the good of others, such as preaching the word of God, hearing confessions properly, assisting the sick, especially when they are near death; instructing those who are ignorant of their faith, consoling those in affliction, bringing back the erring, in all things imitating Christ, "who went about doing good and healing all oppressed by the devil" (Acts x., 38). But let that important warning of the apostle be carefully remembered: "Neither he that planteth is anything nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (I. Cor. iii., 7). For men may go forth weeping and sowing their seed, and they may till it with much labor, but it belongs to God and to His most powerful help to make the seed germinate and bring forth the desired fruit. Besides, it must always be borne in mind that men are but as instruments which God utilizes for the salvation of souls, and that it is required of them that they should be fit to be handled by God. Wherefore? Do we think that God is moved by any natural or acquired excellence of ours to use our assistance for the increase of His glory?

By no means, for it is written: "The foolish things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the strong; and the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible and things that are not hath God chosen, that He might bring to naught things that are" (I. Cor. i., 27, 28). One thing alone joins man with God, makes him pleasing and a not unworthy minister of His mercy: holiness of life and conduct. The priest who lacks this, the supereminent knowledge of Christ, lacks all. For disjoined from this, even the abundance of acquired knowledge (which we ourself are seeking to promote among the clergy) and skill and quickness in acting, although they may prove of some profit to the Church and to individuals, are not unfrequently a lamentable cause of loss to them. But how much can be attempted and accomplished by the man, however lowly, who is adorned with and rich in sanctity is shown by numerous examples in all ages, and very brilliantly by one of recent date, that model pastor of souls, John Baptist Vianney, to whom we rejoice to have decreed the honors of the blessed in heaven. Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation requires us to be: men crucified to the world, and for whom the world itself is crucified; men walking in newness of life, who, as Paul admonishes, should show themselves as the ministers of God "in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth" (II. Cor. vi., 5 foll.); whose thoughts are fixed only on heavenly things, and who strive by all means to lead others thither.

But since, as all are aware, sanctity of life is the fruit of our will, only in as far as our will is strengthened by Divine grace, God Himself makes abundant provision that we may never, if we so wish, be destitute of grace, and this we acquire chiefly by the practice of prayer. Truly between prayer and sanctity the connection is so close that one cannot exist without the other, and Chrysostom was quite in the truth when he said: "I think it must be plain to all that it is simply impossible to live virtuously without the help of prayer" (*De precatone, orat. I.*), while Augustine acutely concludes that "he truly knows how to live rightly who knows how to pray rightly" (*Hom., IV. ex 50*). But Christ Himself brings home to us still more forcibly, by His frequent exhortations, and most of all by His example, the force of these quotations. For in order to pray He was wont to retire into desert places or to go up in the mountains alone. He used to spend whole nights in prayer. He frequently went into the temple; nay, even when the crowds pressed around Him, He used to pray openly with His eyes raised to

heaven. And at the end, when nailed to the cross, amid the pains of death, He implored the Father with a loud cry and with tears. Let us have it for certain, therefore, that a priest, to fulfill worthily his dignity and his office, must be given in a marked way to the practice of prayer. Too often it is to be lamented that he applies himself to it rather from custom than from devotion when he recites the psalms negligently or hurries through a few prayers at stated hours and for the rest of the day never thinks of addressing God or piously turning his mind upwards. Yet the priest should obey much more diligently than others the command of Christ: "We ought always to pray" (Luke xvii., 1), and hence Paul was so earnest in urging: "Be instant in prayer, watching in it in thanksgiving" (Coloss. iv., 2). "Pray without ceasing" (I. Thess. v., 17). For the soul that is desirous of its own sanctity, as well as of the salvation of others, how many occasions are given every day for turning to God! Inward troubles, the strength and obstinacy of temptations, lack of virtues, remissness in labor and the sterility of it, most frequent offenses and negligences, the fear of the divine judgments—all these are powerful incentives to us to cry out before the Lord and thus, in addition to receiving the aid we seek, to become easily rich in merits. Nor is it for ourselves alone that we should weep. Amid the deluge of iniquity which is spreading on all sides, it is for us especially to implore and beseech the Divine mercy, for us to entreat Christ, so benignly lavish of all grace in the wonderful sacrament: "Spare, O Lord, spare Thy people."

On this head it is of the first importance that a certain time should be allotted every day for meditation on the things of eternity. No priest can omit this without being guilty of serious negligence and to the detriment of his soul. Writing to Eugene III., formerly his pupil, but at the time Roman Pontiff, the most holy Abbot Bernard frankly and urgently admonished him never to omit his daily meditation on divine things, on any pretext of the great and many cares that accompany the supreme apostolate. He contended that he was justified in this, thus enumerating most prudently the advantages of the practice: "Meditation purifies the source—that is, the mind—from which it springs. Then it governs the affections, directs the acts, corrects the excesses, regulates the conduct, brings purity and order into the life of him who practices it; finally it confers knowledge both of human and divine things. Meditation separates what is confused, brings together what is divided, collects what is scattered, reveals what is hidden, investigates what is the truth, examines what is probable, discovers what is false and fictitious. Meditation ordains what is to be done, reflects on what has been performed, so that nothing remains in the mind either incor-

rect or needing to be corrected. In prosperity it has the sense of coming adversity; when adversity comes, it comes unfelt; and of these, the latter is the fruit of fortitude, the former of prudence."

This summary of the advantages which meditation is designed to secure for us also teaches and admonishes us not only how salutary it is in every way, but how very necessary.

For august and venerable as are the various offices of the priesthood, it happens that those who have to perform them frequently and familiarly come to treat them in a way not consonant with their dignity. Hence the soul gradually losing its fervor, the way to carelessness is made easy, with consequent distaste for the most sacred things. Then, again, the priest is obliged to be in daily intercourse, as it were, "in the midst of a wicked people," so that frequently even in the very performance of his work of pastoral charity he has reason to fear the secret wiles of the serpent. And are not even religious hearts prone to be soiled by the dust of the world? It is apparent, then, that there exists a great and urgent necessity to return daily to the contemplation of eternity, that the mind and the will, deriving fresh strength therefrom, may be fortified against the allurements of the world. Moreover, it behoves a priest to be possessed of a certain facility of rising to and dwelling on heavenly things, for it is his duty to relish, to declare, to persuade heavenly things, and to so order his life above human affairs that whatever he does in the fulfillment of his sacred office he may do it according to God under the instinct and the guidance of faith. Now, this habit of mind and this, as it were, native union with God is greatly furthered and protected by the practice of daily meditation—a truth which must be so plain to every thoughtful man that it is unnecessary to dwell longer on it.

A confirmation, albeit a painful one, of all this is to be found in the lives of those priests who make light of meditation on divine things, or have open antipathy for it. See those men in whom "the sense of Christ," that most estimable gift, languishes, entirely occupied with earthly things, following vanity, babbling of trifles, performing their sacred duties negligently, coldly, perhaps even unworthily! Once, while the gift of the sacerdotal unction was fresh upon them, they used to prepare their souls diligently for the psaltery, to seek out the most favorable time and place, far from the din of the world, to endeavor to penetrate the sense of the divine words, to praise and weep and exult, to pour out their spirit with the psalmist. But now how changed are they from of old! And thus hardly anything is left in them of their former ardent devotion towards the divine mysteries. How pleasant were those tabernacles in the days gone by! How the heart rejoiced to be

present in the circle of the table of the Lord, and to call others and still others thither! What purity before the sacrifice, what prayers issued forth from the desiring soul! And during its progress how great was the reverence, how perfectly the august ceremonies were performed in all their beauty! What heartfelt thanksgiving, and how happily the good odor of Christ went out among the people! "Call to mind," we beseech you, beloved sons, "call to mind the former days," for then the soul was aglow, when it fed on holy meditation.

Among those who are loath or who neglect "to consider in their hearts" (Jer. xii., 11) there are some who do not hide their consequent poverty of soul, but rather excuse it on the plea that they are entirely given up to the bustle of ministerial life for the manifold utility of others. But they are miserably deluded. For when priests not accustomed to converse with God speak of Him to others, or give counsel on the Christian life, they are utterly destitute of the divine impulse, and their preaching of the Gospel seems to be, as it were, half dead. Their voice, be it ever so rich in prudence and eloquence, bears no resemblance to the voice of the Good Shepherd, which the sheep listen to for their salvation. It makes a noise and flows away emptily, and sometimes it is fruitful in bad example, to the shame of religion and the offense of the good. So is it also with the other parts of the busy life, they are either altogether without result or the results are fleeting through lack of that heavenly dew which "the prayer of him that humbleth himself" (Eccl. xxxv., 2) calls forth so abundantly. And here we cannot but bitterly lament the conduct of those who, taken up with pestiferous novelties, are not afraid to contradict all this, and who consider the time spent in meditation and prayer as lost! O fatal blindness! Would that such considered the subject rightly within themselves and recognized at last how this neglect of and contempt for prayer ends! From it have sprung pride and contumacy, producing those bitter fruits which our paternal heart recoils to think of and ardently wishes to see wither away. May God grant the wish, and looking down in His kindness on the erring, pour out upon them "the spirit of grace and of prayer" in such abundance that they may bewail their errors, and, to the joy of all, return to the paths they have so unfortunately abandoned, and for the future walk in them with more circumspection. And so may God be our witness, as of old for the apostle, how we "long after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phill. i., 8).

For them and for all of you, beloved sons, let this exhortation of ours, which is that of Christ the Lord, take deep root: "Take ye heed, watch and pray" (Mark xiii., 33). But especially in the

practice of pious meditation let the efforts of all be engaged, let the soul win confidence from frequent repetition of the words, "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke xi., 1). There is one special reason which should have much weight in urging us to practice meditation—the wealth of counsel and virtue derived therefrom for that most difficult of all tasks, the proper care of souls. St. Charles in one of his pastorals dwells on this in a manner worthy of being remembered: "Understand, brethren, that nothing is so necessary for all ecclesiastics as mental prayer, preceeding, accompanying and following all our actions. 'I will sing and I will understand,' says the Prophet (Ps. c., 2). If you administer the sacrament, O brother, meditate on what you are doing; if you celebrate Mass, meditate on what you are offering; if you are reciting the psalms, meditate to whom and what you are speaking; if you are engaged in the care of souls, meditate by whose blood they have been washed." (Ex oration, ad clerum.) Hence it is that the Church rightly and justly commands us to repeat frequently those words of David: "Blessed is the man who meditates on the law of the Lord; his will shall remain by night and by day; all things that he shall do shall prosper." Finally there remains one noble incentive worth all the others. For if the priest is called *Another Christ*, and is so by reason of the communication of authority, should he not entirely become so, and be held as such, also by reason of his imitation of the actions of Christ? "Let our chief care, therefore, be to meditate on the life of Christ" (Imitation i., 1).

With the daily contemplation of divine things it is of great importance that the priest should unite the assiduous reading of pious books, especially those that are divinely inspired. Thus Paul commanded Timothy: "Attend unto reading" (I. Tim. iv., 13). So also Jerome, training Nepotian in the priestly life, inculcated: "Let sacred reading be never out of your hands," and he proceeds to give a reason for his advice: "Learn yourself what you are to teach, attain that faithful speech which is according to knowledge, that you may be able to exhort in sound teaching, and put to silence those that contradict" (Ep. lviii. ad Paulinum, no. 6). What great profit from this exercise for the priests who practice it constantly, how full of savour is their preaching of Christ, and how forcibly the minds and hearts of their hearers, instead of being smoothed and petted, are drawn to better things and raised to heavenly desires! But for another reason, and one, beloved sons, greatly profitable to you, should the counsel of Jerome be taken to heart: "Let sacred reading be never out of your hands" (Ep. ad Paulinum, no. 6). For who does not know of the great influence exercised over the mind of a friend by a friend who candidly warns him, helps him with advice,

rebukes, stimulates, leads him back from error? "Blessed is he who finds a true friend" (Eccli. xxv., 12); "he who finds him finds a treasure" (Ib., vi., 14). Now pious books we must count as truly faithful friends.

For they solemnly warn us of our duties and of the precepts of lawful discipline; they awake in our souls the heavenly voices that have been silenced; they disturb the treacherous calm in which we live; they charge us with those inclinations which contain concealed snares; they reveal the dangers that so often lie in the path of the unwary. And all this they do with such silent kindness that they show themselves not only to be our friends, but our very best friends. Thus we have always, whenever we like, at our very side friends ever ready to help us in our most secret necessities, friends whose voice is never harsh, whose counsel is never dictated by cupidity, whose speech is never timid or false. There are many striking examples to show the salutary efficacy of pious books, but on that stands out beyond all others is that of Augustine, whose immense services to the Church dated their origin from it: "Take and read, take and read. . . . I took up [the Epistle of Paul] and read in silence . . . (Luke xvi., 8). As though the light of certainty were infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt disappeared" (Conf. i., viii., c. 12). But too often alas! in our days the contrary happens, and ecclesiastics are gradually plunged in the darkness of doubt, and led to follow the crooked paths of the age, chiefly because to pious and divine books they far prefer others of all kinds and a host of periodicals, that bring seductive error and pestilence in their train. Be on your guard, beloved sons; rely not on the fact that you have reached years of maturity or even advanced age, and be not deluded by the treacherous hope that by reading these you will be in a better position to provide for the common welfare. Certain limits are to be observed, those prescribed by the laws of the Church and those which prudence and charity for one's self point out; for when a man once takes these poisons into his heart, very rarely does he escape the evil consequences.

The profit accruing to the priest both from devout reading and from meditation on heavenly things will be more abundant if he takes steps to discover whether he religiously studies to turn to practical account in his life what he has read and meditated. Chrysostom has a passage, especially adapted for priests, which is directly to the point: "Every day at nightfall, before sleep comes upon you, 'excite the judgment of your conscience, demand an account from it, and whatever evil counsels you may have taken during the day . . . dig them up and root them out, and take upon yourself the penalty for them'" (Exposit. in Ps. iv., n. 8).

How true this is, and how fruitful for Christian virtue, is shown by the excellent admonitions and exhortations of the most prudent masters of the spiritual life. There is a striking passage in the discipline of St. Bernard well worth remembering: "Be a careful examiner of your integrity, search out your own life in daily discussion with yourself. Watch diligently how much progress you make, or how much you have gone back. . . . Strive to know yourself. . . . Put all your transgressions before your own eyes. . . . Set yourself before yourself as before another, and so weep for yourself" (*Meditationes piissimae*, c. v., de quotid. sui ipsius exam.).

It is truly shameful if the words of Christ find their application here also: "The children of the world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." We see with what attention they look after their business; how frequently they go over the accounts of their expenditure and receipts; how accurately and closely they make up their accounts; how they bewail their losses and how eagerly they strive to make them good. But we, with our mind perhaps bent on securing honors, on increasing our substance, on winning only applause and honor by our knowledge, become tired or annoyed in treating of what is our main concern, and that a most arduous one, viz., the acquiring of holiness. For but rarely do we collect ourselves to explore our hearts, which thus become overgrown with weeds as was the case of the lazy man's vineyard of which it was written: "I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man; and behold it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down" (*Pro.* xxiv., 30, 31). And the necessity of walking every day with greater caution and of making more strenuous efforts is increased by the many bad examples which we see around us and which are so deadly even for priestly virtue. Now experience teaches that the man who exercises a frequent and rigid censorship over his thoughts, words and actions is the better capable at once of hating and avoiding evil and of cultivating earnestly what is good. Experience equally teaches us how many drawbacks and losses fall to the lot of the man who shuns that tribunal where justice sits in judgment, and his conscience appears as the culprit and as his accuser. In such a man you will in vain look for that circumspection of conduct, so highly praiseworthy in the Christian, which seeks to avoid even minor faults, that modesty of soul, so becoming to the priest, which trembles before every offense, even the slightest, against God. Nay, it sometimes happens even that this carelessness and negligence of himself reaches the point when he neglects the very sacrament of penance, than which Christ in His great mercy has left no more suitable remedy for human weakness. It cannot be

denied, but it is to be bitterly deplored, that not unfrequently the man who deters others from sin by the fulminations of his sacred oratory, has no fear for himself and allows himself to become hardened in his own sins; that he who exhorts and incites others not to delay in cleansing themselves duly of their stains, is himself so slothful and delays long months to do the same; that he who pours the oil and wine of salvation into the wounds of others, lies himself wounded by the wayside, taking no thought to secure for himself the healing hand of a brother, and that so very near to him. Alas, how much has happened everywhere in the past and how much is happening to-day absolutely unworthy in the sight of God and the Church, pernicious to the Christian people, and shameful for the priestly order!

When the duty of our office obliges us to think on all this, beloved sons, our heart is filled with grief, and we groan aloud: Woe to the priest who does not know how to keep his place, and who unfaithfully pollutes the name of the holy God for whom he should be holy! The corruption of the best is most dreadful: "Great is the dignity of priests, but great is their ruin if they sin; let us rejoice in the height upon which we stand, but let us fear the depths to which we may fall; the joy of having held loftiest places is not so great as the grief of having fallen headlong into the abyss" (S. Hieron., in Ezech., l. xiii., c. 44, v. 30). Woe then to the priest who, unmindful of himself, abandons the practice of prayer, who rejects the nourishment of spiritual reading, who never turns back to himself to listen to the voice of his accusing conscience! Neither the bleeding wounds of his own soul nor the lamentations of his Mother Church shall rouse the wretched man until those terrible threats strike him: "Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and I heal them" (Is. vi., 10). May God, rich in mercy, avert from every one of you, beloved sons, this terrible omen. He who sees our heart knows that there is in it no bitterness against anybody, but that it is stirred with all the charity of a pastor and a father for all: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Are not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

But you see, all of you in all parts of the world, on what times the Church, in the hidden designs of God, has fallen. See also, then, and meditate how holy is the office you hold, that you may strive to be of help and assistance in her trials to her from whom you have received the great dignity with which you are endowed. Now, if never before, therefore, it is necessary that the clergy should be filled with no ordinary virtue, sound in example, watchful, active,

thoroughly ready to work for Christ and to withstand the strongest attacks. For nothing else do we pray and yearn more ardently than that this may be realized in you, one and all. Let chastity, therefore, ever flourish among you in unblemished honor, that choicest ornament of our order, in whose beauty as the priest is made like to the angels so is he, too, more venerable in the eyes of the Christian people, and richer in holy fruits. Let the reverence and obedience solemnly promised to those whom the Holy Ghost has placed as rulers of the Church ever flourish and increase, and especially let your minds and hearts be drawn daily in closer bonds of fidelity in the obedience most justly due to this apostolic see. Let charity, that never seeketh its own, shine forth in all, so that the goads of envy and ambition may be restrained and all your efforts unite in friendly emulation for the increase of God's glory.

The fruits of your charity are waited for by a *great multitude of the sick, the blind, the lame, the withered*, all in the direst misery, but most of all by dense throngs of youths, the fairest hope of the State and of religion, who are now surrounded on every side by fallacies and corruption. Be diligent not only in catechetical instruction, which we commend once more and most earnestly, but by every means and with all the skill of which you are capable, strive to deserve well of all. By elevating, protecting, healing, pacifying, set your hearts and your desires on winning or binding souls to Christ. How tirelessly, alas! and how laboriously and fearlessly His enemies are acting and pressing on, to the immense ruin of souls! The Catholic Church rejoices and glories greatly in the charitable zeal of her clergy in preaching the Gospel of Christian peace, in bringing salvation and civilization even to barbarous nations, and thus by their labors, often consecrated by the shedding of their blood, the kingdom of Christ is being daily propagated and our holy faith is winning new laurels and still greater lustre. And if your charitable offices, beloved sons, meet with insults, abuse, calumny, as only too frequently is the case, do not therefore give way to sadness, "be not weary in well-doing" (II. Thess. iii., 13). Keep before your eyes that host of great men who, following the example of the Apostles, in the midst of bitterest contumely borne for the name of Christ, "went rejoicing, blessing when they were cursed." For we are the sons of the saints whose names are resplendent in the book of life, whose praises the Church proclaims: "Let us not stain our glory" (I. Macc. ix., 10).

Once we have restored and increased the spirit of sacerdotal grace among all orders of the clergy, our designs, under the Divine guidance, for the restoration of all else, will acquire far more efficacy. Wherefore in addition to what we have already set forth, we deem

it well to add certain subsidiary and appropriate means for preserving and fostering grace in the clergy. And first of these, a means known to and approved by all but not by all sufficiently tried, comes the devout retreat of the soul in what are known as spiritual exercises, yearly when this is possible, and either separately, or rather in union with others, for in this manner more fruit is usually obtained—but always according to the prescriptions of the Bishops. The advantages of this practice we ourself have sufficiently praised in laying down certain rules regarding discipline for the Roman clergy (Ep. "Experiendo" ad Card. in Urbe Vicarium, 27 Dec., 1904).

Not less profitable, too, are short retreats for a few hours every month, either privately or in common, a custom which we are glad to see has been introduced in various places, with the favor of the Bishops who sometimes preside themselves over such gatherings.

Again we heartily commend a certain closer union of priests among themselves, as becomes brothers, under the sanction and the rule of the Bishop. It is certainly profitable that they should unite to render mutual assistance to one another in adversity, to protect the honor of their name and office against attack, and for other similar reasons. But it is far more important that they should join together for the purpose of promoting sacred knowledge, and first of all for maintaining with greater earnestness the holy purpose of their vocation, for consulting the interests of souls, by combining their counsels and their strength. The annals of the Church bear witness to the excellent fruit derived from this kind of communion in the days when priests generally lived in a sense in common. Why should not something of the kind be revived in our time, as far as may be done with due regard to different places and offices? Is there not good reason to hope that the former fruits would thus be produced again, to the joy of the Church? Indeed, there are already in existence a number of such societies, with the approval of the Bishops, and they are all the more useful when priests enter them early, at the very beginning of their priesthood. We ourself during our episcopate favored one which we found to be very suitable, and even now we continue to favor it, and others, in a special way. These aids to sacerdotal grace and those others which the watchful prudence of the Bishops may suggest as occasion serves, do you, beloved sons, so value and so employ, that every day more and more "you may walk worthy of the vocation in which you have been called" (Eph. iv., 1) honoring your ministry, and perfecting in you the will of God which is your sanctification.

Such are our chief thoughts and anxieties; wherefore, raising our eyes up to heaven, with the voice of Christ the Lord we suppliantly

and frequently repeat on behalf of all the clergy: "Holy Father . . . sanctify them" (John xvii., ii., 17). We rejoice that in this holy aim great numbers of all ranks of the faithful are praying with us, deeply solicitous for your common good and that of the Church; nay more, that there are generous souls not a few, nor confined to those dedicated to religion but living in the midst of the world, who freely offer themselves as victims to God for the same purpose. May God Almighty receive their pure and powerful prayers in the odor of sweetness, nor despise our own most humble prayers. May He in His mercy and providence vouchsafe to hear us, we earnestly pray, and from the most sacred Heart of His Beloved Son pour out on all the clergy the treasures of grace, charity and all virtue. Finally, beloved sons, we heartily thank you for the good wishes you have offered us so abundantly on the approach of the fiftieth anniversary of our priesthood, and that our good wishes for you in return may be fulfilled over and over we put them in the hands of the great Virgin Mother, Queen of Apostles. For she it was who by her example taught those first fruits of the sacred order how they should persevere unanimously in prayer till they were clothed with virtue from above, and that this same virtue in them might be made greatly more abundant she obtained by her prayers, she increased and strengthened by her counsel for the rich fertility of their labors. Meanwhile, beloved sons, we earnestly hope that the peace of Christ may exult in your hearts with the joy of the Holy Ghost, through the Apostolic Benediction which we impart to you all most lovingly.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the fourth day of August in the year MCMVIII., beginning the sixth year of our Pontificate.

PIUS X., POPE.