

HOLINESS IN THE PRIEST CONSECRATED TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

"Increase in him the spirit of holiness" (Rite of Priestly Ordination). Still on the wave of the Jubilee Year and in constant expectation of the completion of the Triumph of our Mother's Immaculate Heart, where should be the focus of our attention? Both the Messages themselves and the call of the Holy Father point us in the same direction:

1. *The Book of the Messages*: In one of the earliest messages, we find these words, which give character to the Movement and to the purpose for which our Mother desired it: "You do not have to be numerous, but you must be holy". (M. 19, 13th. October 1973)
2. The second source is the great gift of the Holy Father's stupendous Apostolic Letter "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*" (NMI), in which he offers us a programme of life for the Church following the Jubilee Year. He tells us: "First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*. Was this not the ultimate meaning of the Jubilee indulgence, as a special grace offered by Christ so that the life of every baptised person could be purified and deeply renewed?" (NMI, 30)

A new Church, renewed in holiness, a renewal based on interior conversion, which our Mother asks of us in our Act of Consecration. Self-evident, one might say, in a certain, because the Church has no other purpose in its existence than that of forming God's people in holiness. But now an emphasis greater than ever in its history, for the need of it has never been so great. We have lived through a terrible period of history, which has caused our Mother to come from Heaven with Her programme of formation in holiness, because of the diabolic attempt precisely to tear holiness out of the heart of mankind in ...

"a great struggle between the Woman clothed with the sun and the Red Dragon, which was to last throughout the whole century (the twentieth), as a proud challenge to God on the part of My adversary, certain of succeeding in destroying the Church and bringing the whole human race to a universal rejection of God". (M. 297, 9th. November 1984)

It is Mother Mary's task to restore *the heart* of the world. The way of the Movement shows a way to put into practice the call of the Church through the Millenium.

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This call must be very precious to us of the Movement, and we must try to understand the depth of holiness to which our Mother is calling us. It is easy to make the act of consecration as a formula, but that is only the first step. It is nothing to do with numbers or crowds, but with the interior reality of each one, and I sometimes have the anxiety that the depth of the call has not been confronted sufficiently, for it is a privileged one, but very demanding. It is the task of a retreat like this to help us to look, and to seek (dare we say it?) an atmosphere of silence in these few days for this.

When we speak of holiness which our Mother asks of Her Movement, we speak not only of the outward pillars on which a holy life is built for all in the Church, but we must look specially at that very special context of life in which She wants us to live them, namely the spirit which is Her gift to us, not so much as our charism (for those who like to speak Greek!) in the Movement; that spirit entrusted to the Movement to live, but also to offer to the world.

This spirit is wholly interior. It is not simply a question of norms and practices (the things which we must do in order to become holy, but rather a gift which we are invited to receive:

"If you but knew, beloved sons, *the gift* you have received in consecrating yourselves to My Immaculate Heart". (M. 131, 29th. July 1977)

In the Marian Movement of Priests I wonder whether these little words occupy a sufficient place in the way of thinking of many:

"*I want to give them My Heart*, for this they must accustom themselves to live always in My motherly Heart". (M.27, 27th. November 1973)

They are key words, and describe the forum of the holiness of a priest of Mary's Movement. The expression "Her Immaculate Heart" stands for our Mother's entire interior reality, and Her call is a call to holiness precisely because She invites us to enter into a profound union with that presence of total grace, which is the

joy of God and to be the forum of our own holiness. There is no room for mediocrity in what She calls us to be. Nor does it mean that we do not belong to Her unless we have reached that special state of grace, and it certainly does not mean that a man may have disqualified himself through a life of sin in the past, but it does mean that we should understand just what it is that we are called to and that we should accept to seek it within ourselves.

Such great graces are Heaven's gift of mercy, to be formed by our Mother Herself in us, and therefore all can aspire, provided they are willing to take the necessary steps to dispose themselves to receive them. Her words make clear the depth of Her purpose in us:

"I was preserved from sin because, in this humble creature, the Most Holy Trinity wanted Its wondrous plan to be reflected, whole and entire. I was preserved from sin and filled with grace because I was chosen to become the Mother of the Word and destined to give you My Son Jesus. And My Son Jesus has given Me to each one of you as your true Mother. Therefore My motherly plan for you is to clothe you in My own immaculateness". (M.88, 8th. December 1975)

Our Mother is speaking of a union which is to persist in every moment of our life and in every activity. This union is the fullness of the Cenacle for, while we hold cenacles, of which this retreat is one, there is a Cenacle which never closes, described in the messages as "*the Cenacle of My Immaculate Heart*" (e.g. M. 226, 7th. June 1981), which is to become our permanent spiritual dwelling place. "*They must accustom themselves to live always in My Immaculate Heart*". (M.27, 27th. November 1973 *supra*)

"To live always" in our Mother's heart clearly implies living that spirit which She teaches us in Her messages. But the invitation to live in our Mother's Immaculate Heart also implies a sharing in that privileged spiritual reality which is the secret of Her interior life: it is expressed by Her in very simple words: "*I am the Woman clothed with the sun. I am in the heart of the Divine Trinity*". (M.201, 14th. June 1980)

The reality of Mary as being in the Heart of God, in a union which is indissoluble and totally intimate, beyond the capacity of words to describe, is what She intends to open to us, precisely through union with Her:

"Beloved sons, in these days I have given great graces to each one of you, Truly, I have obtained for you in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Who has brought about in you the transformation of your hearts and lives. Just how important these days have been for you, you will understand shortly. For the moment, I am giving you the grace to live in the Heart of the Most Holy Trinity, where your Heavenly Mother has Her habitual dwelling place".
(M. 547, 28th. June 1995)

Words describing our life in the same terms as Her own. And so we may say that the invitation of our Mother to enter into a deep and habitual union with Her Immaculate Heart is, in fact, an invitation to enter into a union with the Blessed Trinity Itself: deeper than usual, for it is a sharing in that union with God possessed by the Immaculate Heart of Mary Herself.

It is important that we are able to think this way. For some, these days, speaking of the purely supernatural can seem too abstract, beyond the range of reason and therefore of little account, but our Mother speaks to us of these things, as She wants us to appreciate the depth of the gift we have received. And yet it is our true life: *Your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

Our Mother tells us, in a sublime way, in Message 131, 29th. July 1977, of the life She offers us in Her Heart. She speaks to us of a Garden, in which a totally pure and sacred atmosphere is guarded and controlled by the Holy Spirit. It was of this reality that She was speaking when She told us of the gift we receive in making our consecration to Her Immaculate Heart. It is the pure life of God: *"Enter this My Garden. In it is reflected the most pure light of the Divine Trinity"* (M. 131); it is the indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity par excellence. It is into this atmosphere of spiritual intimacy of life with God that we are invited to dwell.

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Our Mother's *relationship with the Father* is a special one, made so by virtue of Her Immaculate Conception. It lies in Her exceptional purity: in Her mind, through being nourished on His holy Will, His Word, confronting every moment in His Love. For this, as the Holy Father tells us, we must go to the school of Mary, which we discover in the Garden of Her Heart There we

encounter the first lesson, standing before the Father. The fact is that that Love is formed in purity of the Will. One supreme moment in our Mother's life demonstrates that purity of heart and will to us. It is the moment of the Annunciation. She was told by the Archangel the most marvellous news which could come to any Jewish girl: She would be the Mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. What is Her reply? It could be expected legitimately that it would be an expression of Her own personal delight, but instead there is nothing of Herself, no hint of Her own satisfaction, but only Her all-consuming desire to be and to do exactly what God wanted of Her. *Behold the Handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto Me according to Thy Word.* (Lk. 1:38)

It is an answer which must be meditated on, a "silent" answer, which reveals the total purity of a soul, which desires no other good than to please God. Had His Angel revealed the name of another to have this privilege, She would have been equally content, because that too would have been what God wanted, the only good in Her way of seeing. In this way, the perfection of God's plan can be fulfilled in Her, with no obstruction of the self. This what is meant when we call Her Heart "Immaculate":

"I am the Immaculate Conception. In Me, the Father shows forth the perfect plan which He had at the moment of the creation of the whole universe".
(M. 11th. February 1997)

It is the attitude of *adoration*, through the harmonising of the human will with that of the Father, the *Fiat*. It is the expression of the covenant, heaven united to earth. *And the Angel left Her* - everything had been said, nothing remained to be said. It is the model of holiness for us.

It is the road to union with the Son, for the Heart of Mary is the forum of the preparation of the Word in His life on earth, and so it is to be ours. It is to Her that Jesus brings us, in order that we may be more specially His own and that our hearts, through Her Immaculate Heart, should become conformed to His Sacred Heart.

"I see that it is Jesus Himself Who leads you to Me, because in this way you will give to His Heart that joy which others cannot give Him".
(M. 111, 8th. November 1976)

"Here he also brought His first disciples, that they might be strengthened and receive, each and all, His very own imprint. In this garden they grew, little by little, according to His divine plan; they became more humble, purer, more generous, stronger. Here they were well cultivated until each one attained that resemblance to Jesus which He Himself desired. (My Heart) was also the altar on which My Son was immolated; the chalice which received His Blood, which opened itself to the moaning of His wounds, which was opened wide to the great gift of His dying Heart. He desired that this garden should also become yours; and so, He gave you His Mother."

In Her Immaculate Heart, leading us along the way of the Fiat, She leads us to the Sacred Heart, along the only way, that of the Cross:

"The path along which I wish to lead My beloved sons, the Priests who are consecrated to My Immaculate Heart and who belong to the Movement is *that of the Cross*. This is the road which the Priests called to form My cohort must follow, in order that men redeemed by My Son, but snatched from Him by Satan, may yet be saved today through a special intervention of this motherly Heart of mine. *The way of the Cross*, My little children, is the only way that I have traced out for you, because it is that which your Mother has first travelled together with Her Son Jesus. Journey along it without fear, because you will be led by the hand by Me, heartened by My motherly tenderness. Journey along it with Me, in My Immaculate Heart; near your cross you will thus feel the presence of your Mother Who will comfort and help you. This road must be travelled by you, because only in this way can you be similar to My Son Jesus in all things. My duty is that of making you in every way similar to Him. Now that I have detached you from everything to make you ready to do the will of the Father, and formed you into only little children to make you Priests according to the Heart of Jesus, the time has come when you are being called to climb Calvary with Him. This is the hour of Calvary for My Church, for the Holy Father, and for all the Priests who want to be faithful to My Son and the Gospel. But it is also, beloved sons, your most beautiful hour for which I have prepared each one of you for a long time. Say with Me: "Yes, Father, Your will be done". (M. 71, 28th. March 1975)

And all this brought to life by the Presence and the light of the Holy Spirit, our Mother's Bridegroom and Guardian of the Garden of Her Immaculate Heart:

"The Holy Spirit is the only Gardener within My enclosure. He has overshadowed Me with the light of His love; He has filled Me with all His gifts; He has embellished Me with His grandeur and has made Me His

Spouse. In My Immaculate Heart this divine prodigy has taken place. My garden is His exclusive property: it is the Holy Spirit Who waters it and gives it light; it is He Who causes the most beautiful flowers to spring up; it is He Who gives them their colour and fragrance; it is How Who brings therein whom He wills. No one can enter unless He Himself opens to them; no one walks therein unless He leads them forward... It is the Holy Spirit Who has brought you into My garden. And through your Heavenly Mother, He is now cultivating you with His gifts, and enriching you with all the virtues. This is how you are growing in holiness, becoming more and more Priests according to My design, and moving forward that you may be introduced by Him into the depths of My Immaculate Heart, wherein shines brilliantly all the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Remain therefore forever in My garden". (M. 131, 29th. July 1977)

"In the Cenacle of My Immaculate Heart, dispose yourselves to receive this divine Spirit. The Father gives Him to you to associate you intimately in His very own life and that the image of the Son, in Whom He has made to repose all His pleasure, may shine forth in you ever more perfectly. Jesus gives Him to you as the most precious fruit of His Redemption, as Witness of His Person and of His divine mission ... My Immaculate Heart is the golden doorway through which this divine Spirit passes to reach you. And so I invite you to repeat often: 'Come, Holy Spirit, come by means of the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Your well-beloved Spouse'. (M. 226, 7th. June 1981)

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Let us return to the Holy Father. He points out, as we said in beginning our meditation, that the call to holiness is of a high order, precisely because of the fact that it is a call into the all-pure life of the Eternal Trinity Itself. Our Mother tells us that it is not our pastoral planning alone that will provide the true renewal of the Church, but Jesus in the Eucharist (M. 330, 8th. August 1986). The Holy Father tells us:

"In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalistic ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) (NMI 31)

And all this is sealed by the presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, which underlines for us the fact that holiness is a pure gift, supremely so when we contemplate, as we have done, that its forum derives from the gift of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to be our own and then, above all, the presence of Her Divine Son personally within us. Therefore our Mother leads us, as we have meditated in recent years, that our Mother's call is to be *priests according to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus*. We must constantly remind ourselves that, as priests, in relation to the Blessed Eucharist, we have a very special call to holiness for, as it has been said in the Tradition, we live and act "*in persona Christi*". If it were ever possible to grasp the height and the depth of that expression and of its truth for us, then we would be driven to a quest for holiness and a sense of its need which would be difficult to bear!

But that "identity" with Christ, occupying His place in all our unworthiness, leads us into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity, for that is His place and we share in all that is His. For us, the words of Our Lord the night before He died, have a special significance: "*I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me ... that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them*" (John XVII:26).

We have heard our Mother telling us of Her gift of the grace to live in the Heart of the Most Blessed Trinity. Here it is, and it is the secret of the gift of holiness offered to Her consecrated Priest-sons. For this, we can only dispose ourselves, and with much humility.

It gives us our identity, in Him, and this must lead us to prayer which respects this gift. The Holy Father speaks of it in relation to liturgical prayer, in which all prayer is offered as the prayer of the Church, in union with Its Head, Jesus the High Priest, to the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father says:

"Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the Liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life, but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life".

(*NMI 32*)

A little saint who made this wonderful doctrine the pattern of her life expressed it this way: "I confide in you that what has made my life into an anticipated Heaven is "*believing that a Being, Whose name is Love, dwells in us at every moment of the day and the night and that He invites us to enter into Company with Him*" (Bl. Elisabeth of the Trinity, Letter 284 to Mme. Gout de Bize).

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In that life of the Blessed Three Who dwell within us, as we have seen, we share the place of the Son, and that demands of us that we be *men of prayer*. How could it be otherwise? Without a life and love of prayer, how can anyone possibly want to consider his life a genuine quest for holiness? The Holy Father says:

"The time has come to propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine 'training in holiness', adapted to people's needs. This training must integrate the resources offered to everyone with both the traditional forms of individual and group assistance, as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognised in the Church. This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in *the art of prayer*. Is it not one of the "signs of the times" that in today's world, despite widespread secularisation, there is a widespread *demand for spirituality?*"

(*TMA, 31,32,33*)

We are pastors. Our pastoral activity, if well done, is in itself; to become holy, we must seek to form ourselves in the cultivation of holiness and prayer in those entrusted to our care, and for this our Mother has, in a special way, entrusted the Rosary and the cenacles to us for them. Our Mother sets out the pillars of prayer which belong to the life of a priest and through which we must form ourselves: the Holy Mass, offered and lived well, the Breviary, never missed, the daily Rosary, our daily meditation, not to be missed.

(*M. 47, 20th. May 1974; M. 148, 11th. February 1978*)

But then, She does not limit this to specific acts of prayer, but to the *spirit of prayer*. We have been given Her Immaculate Heart, to which we must be united, and that Heart is constantly at

prayer. That therefore is the model of holiness set before us. How can we follow? By remembering to accept a very important invitation which She makes to all of us:

"I lead you to be priests according to His divine and merciful Heart. For this reason, I cause you to grow in a profound intimacy of life with Me, in a simple and spontaneous way, so that I can live with you in the dwelling of your priestly life, just as I lived with the apostle John in his house. You must do the same. Become accustomed to doing everything with Me: when you get up, pray, celebrate the Holy Mass, recite the Liturgy of the Hours, and when you are absorbed by your apostolic activity. Also, when you are beautifying the church, when you want to do new things, do them with Me, in a spirit of filial trust and habitual dependence. Then nothing will ever disturb the peace of your heart. If My adversary does everything to lead you to be disturbed, he will find an impenetrable armour all round you and you will always be immersed in a peace which cannot be shaken; you will be led to the highest peaks of interior quiet and contemplation". (M.377, 31st. March 1988)

By virtue of the Presence of the Immaculate Heart in our life (and therefore of our Mother as our constant Partner in everything we do, say or think), we are privileged to offer every moment and aspect of that life to God through that Heart, purified with Her own purity and now become Her own prayer. Thus every moment of life is invested with a holiness which is not our own, is greater than anything we do by ourselves, is made to *share in the very holiness of Mary Herself*, as it is offered by Her. We said that the holiness offered to the priest consecrated to Her Immaculate Heart is a special gift, and here we see it. In this, we are able, as we read earlier, to give to Jesus a joy which others cannot give Him. Clearly, if we are seeking holiness in our Mother's Immaculate Heart, our pastoral activity must seek to give this also to those entrusted to our care. It is our privilege to breathe the atmosphere of Mary and to carry this into every aspect of our life. Our people have the right to expect this of us too. Naturally, this is not limited to the pronouncement of the Act of Consecration, but to the formation of our people in a spirit of prayer and of life with Mary. Where this is present, our parishes and communities can be transformed. It is certainly so in the case of the parish of Jauru, of our

dear friend Father Nazareno, where virtually every act of the parish drew in the patronage of our heavenly Mother. The people there seem to be conscious of belonging to Her in a very special way. It is a little image of the future of the Church, which has been consecrated to Her and which She has been asked to be Patroness of every aspect of its life. I remember also an African parish which, though totally different in its lifestyle from that in Jauru, nevertheless enjoyed the same atmosphere through the consecrated life of its pastor being breathed into his people.

"This response has been given to Me by the parish, in all its components: the Pastor and the flock entrusted to him. The community of the parish has been entrusted to My Immaculate Heart, gathers together in a cenacle of prayer with Me with the recitation of the holy Rosary, prostrating itself in adoration before the Eucharistic Jesus, solemnly exposed on the altar. In this way, Jesus can release His great power of love in souls and, in this poor and scattered place, is already bringing about the triumph of His merciful Love in the advent of His Eucharistic Reign in your midst". (M. 418, 2nd. February 1990)

That is the way our Mother spoke of the work of our brother, Father Nazareno. He gave the whole of his apostolate in his parish of Jauru into the Immaculate Heart of Mary from the start and, by bringing the spirit of the consecration to that Heart, together with the love of Jesus in the Eucharist, the regular purification of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (in which he was tireless), the Rosary and the cenacles into every part of the parish, he made it a place in which the Triumph of our Mother had begun.

This is, of course, something possible for all of us, and conforms to the pattern of the Church of the future which the Holy Father seems to be indicating. He has consecrated the Church to our Mother, not only on the numerous occasions on which he has done this through his pontificate, but for the future, as he did this on 8th. October last during the bishops' Jubilee. The "shape of the new Church is marian, in the care of Mary, entrusted to Her Immaculate Heart to be formed in the ways of grace, to bear Her own spirit in which to live the Gospel. It is to be a Church formed in the school of Mary. But this cannot take place simply at the level of declarations and public gestures. The Church will

become truly marian when this comes about in the local communities and parishes and individual souls because the priests take the people to their Mother.

There are so many aspects of the apostolate. We are ministers of the Truth, and for this we have the Catechism of the Catholic Church to rebut the many abuses in doctrines; we are ministers of the Sacraments, to place eternal life in our people; we are ministers of God's Mercy, and for this we must be devoted ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But we are also entrusted, we who belong to our Mother through consecration to Her Immaculate Heart, with a spirit in which all this must be lived, both by ourselves and our people: the spirit of holiness of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which takes us into the life of the Blessed Trinity Itself. That is our commission. As the Holy Father put it:

“First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness” and also insisted that “Faced with this mystery, we are greatly helped not only by theological investigation, but also by that great heritage which is the lived theology of the saints”. (NM 30, 27)

He is speaking of that “affective theology”, of which we have need, in which we learn to live with our heart what we learn with our mind and which we find in the writings and lived example of the saints. Finally, as the Holy Father said to the children present at the Beatification:

“I tell you that ‘one makes more progress in a short time of submission and dependence on Mary than during entire years of personal initiatives, relying on oneself alone’”. (St. Louis Marie de Montfort, The True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, n.155)

Michael Gaughran SSC

MARIAN MOVEMENT OF PRIESTS

International Retreat for Priests

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