

**IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST
through the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

We have been contemplating the Cenacle in terms of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when the Church was born, but of course there had been another occasion, six weeks earlier, when another act of birth had taken place in that same upper room. It was the occasion of the Last Supper, and there our priesthood was born. Pope John Paul II, in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2000, asks us to look at this, saying: We must always meditate again the mystery of that night. We must go back often in spirit to that Cenacle, in which we priests, in a special way, can feel ourselves to be, in a certain sense, "at home". It could be said of us, in relation to the Cenacle, what the Psalmist says of the people in relation to Jerusalem: "The Lord will write in the book of the peoples: 'There this one was born' (Ps. LXXXVII (LXXXVI):6).

In this meditation, we are looking at the priesthood. We are doing so, as it is necessary for us to do so in a special way, belonging to the Marian Movement of Priests. Our Mother has directed this Movement to us especially as priests, and has called us Her "sons of predilection" precisely in virtue of this gift. Through us She, Who is the Mother with the Priestly Heart, Who understands the nature of the priesthood and the spirit in which it must be lived (for She formed the One and Eternal High Priest) has, as it were, entrusted to us the very special place in Her Immaculate Heart, where the "new heart of the new Church" is being formed.

She wants us to contemplate this wonderful gift with Her, so that it may be lived to the full. In this, we shall be helped by Her the words of Her own Pope, who might be called the Pope of our Movement. It is not a question of seeing ourselves as some sort of elite among priests, in some way holier than others (perhaps we have greater need of mercy than others), but that She wishes to form us, and any others willing to entrust themselves to Her formation, to an experience of living the priesthood worthy of its wonderful reality, for the joy and glory of Her Son Jesus. This lies at the centre of Her renewal of the Church.

In the years in which He conversed at length with our Mother, I am sure that Jesus had told Her much about the future of the Church and of the Apostles in it so that, when She met with them again in the Upper Room for the Cenacle into which the Holy Spirit would come, She must have looked with tender, motherly wonder at these men who were to be at the heart of the infant Church. Her Son had said that He was going away from them, but that He would return. For that return, He had called each of these young men by name and asked them to perpetuate in time the offering of Himself to the Father which He Himself had made at the Last Supper and completed on Calvary. He had placed Himself in their hands, to act in His Person: He had placed in their hands His own High Priesthood and Himself as the Victim. He had ordained them priests, not with another priesthood, but with His own priesthood, which meant Himself living and acting in them.

A totally divine Gift

They had been called by name: Peter, Andrew, James, John and the others. This was the personal choice of each one by the Lord, and now they were gathered with their Mother to await the final Gift which would make the priesthood in each one something totally divine: the Holy Spirit would come upon each one and remain there, for the sacrament of Orders, through its character, is one of the three permanent ones conferred by the Church. And He would come through the new act of motherhood of our Mother, the Bride of that Spirit, as She presided over the Cenacle. And She, in turn, would be the Mother of all Priests, who had been entrusted to Her by Her dying Son: "Behold your Mother" is, of course, addressed to the whole Church, but in a very special way to St. John, who stood there as one of the first priests, representing us all. Of this gift, Pope John Paul told us:

Let us pause in the Cenacle and contemplate the Redeemer Who, in the Last Supper, instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood. In that holy night, He called by name every single priest of all time. His gaze turned to each one, loving and looking into the future, like that which was cast upon... (the Apostles)" (Letter to Priests, 2004)

That very personal nature of the gift of the Lord continues throughout the history of the Church. As He called Peter and the Apostles all by name, so He called each one of us, with His gaze upon us, John, James, Stephen, and so on, and this call, in the "divine eternity" and

across the millenia, was ratified through the hands of a bishop. It is something totally divine. There have been those who have suggested that it is gift which comes from delegation by the local Church.

The Eucharist, like the Priesthood, is a gift of God, "which radically exceeds the power of the assembly" and which "receives this through the episcopal succession going back to the Apostles". (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 29)

The Second Vatican Council teaches that

"the ministerial priest, with the sacred power with which he is invested... offers the eucharistic sacrifice in the Person of Christ and offers it to God in the name of the entire people". (Lumen Gentium, 10)

"The assembly of the faithful, one in faith and in the Spirit and enriched by many gifts, while it constitutes the place in which Christ "is present in His Church, in a special way in the liturgical actions" (Const. On the Liturgy, 7) is unable by itself either to "bring about" the Eucharist or to "give itself" the ordained ministry". (ibid.)

No, in that moment when the bishop's hands were placed on our head, what we received came to us from that Last Supper from the Lord Himself, transmitted to us through a series of bishops but not as their gift. They are the instruments of a gift which is totally divine. In that moment, we were in the pure sphere of God; we were called to be priests *in the very person of Christ*.

In Persona Christi

Our Mother, presiding in the Cenacle of Pentecost, looked at Her new sons, now clothed with this extraordinary new spiritual reality, destined to be the heart of the Church. They were sons given to Her by Jesus and a presence of Her Divine Son. She must have been filled with that "eucharistic amazement" of which the Pope spoke in his encyclical for the Year of the Eucharist.. That same amazement must be ours. If those first apostles would not have seen those most naturally indicated for such a choice, how much more can that be said as we look at ourselves, chosen by name at the same moment in the Cenacle by the Lord: how extraordinary His choice of us! Perhaps we have sometimes marvelled at His choices: He combined into one group a tax-gatherer, a member of the Zealot faction, probably a sort of revolutionary, Peter who would deny Him, a very impulsive man, Thomas and his doubts, and Judas! But, if we marvel at that, we should first look at ourselves, among us some very improbable choices!

"Before this extraordinary reality we remain amazed and astonished: how great is the condescending humility with which God has chosen to bind Himself to humanity in this way! If we pause before the Crib and contemplate the Incarnation of the Word, what should we feel before the altar on which, through the poor hands of the priest, Christ makes His Sacrifice present in time? Nothing remains but to bend the knees in silence, in order to adore this supreme mystery of the Faith". (ibid.)

All this our Mother saw in the Cenacle, in those who were physically present then, but She sees in the successive generations of priests down the ages. But what is this mystery brought about in us which our Mother sees and views with amazement? When we speak of being called to act in persona Christi, we are speaking of the character of the Sacrament of Orders, that constituent of the Sacrament which, in this sacrament and in those of Baptism and Confirmation, remain indelible in the soul. When we speak of "acting" in persona Christi, we are not simply speaking simply of a power which is delegated to us or a delegation to act for another as an ambassador acts for his master. No, it is something far deeper; again, let us hear the Pope:

"The ordained ministry, which can never be reduced just to its functional aspect, because it is given at the level of "being", enables the priest to act in the person of Christ and reaches its peak at the moment in which he consecrates the bread and wine, repeating the gestures and the words of Jesus at the Last Supper". (ibid.)

What is given can "never be reduced to its functional aspect". In other words, we are not simply machines in His hands, uttering certain words and repeating certain gestures. What is given to us involves the whole of our being, the whole man, for we are speaking of something which possessed the whole Person of the Lord.

"At the level of being". It means that, before we take any active step, we are changed in ourselves and our priestly functions flow from the new reality within us. In trying to fully understand this Gift, we embark on a very difficult and very delicate task, On the one hand, we must avoid saying anything which would imply that we somehow become just the Person of Christ, which would obviously be ridiculous, but also we must avoid suggesting that this new gift is simply "something" which we carry about in ourselves, in no way connected with our being, which remains unaltered. As the Holy Father says, the gift of acting in the Person (not just the nature) of

Christ affects us at the level of our *being*. It must remain always a mystery, but you might say that the very Person of the Lord becomes intertwined with our being, so that we become One, while observing all the differences. We must give full weight to those words of Jesus at the Last Supper in His High Priestly prayer (which might be seen as a prayer of ordination): "*That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us*" (John XVII:21). That prayer was, I think, concerned with all the baptised, but in a special way with the priests.

Since it is a change at the level of our being, it must affect all our priestly activity, not just the moment of the offering of the Holy Eucharist, and from this we see the immense nature of what was conferred upon us the day we were ordained. It makes us understand, perhaps, what St. Padre Pio meant when he replied to the question: "If you were to begin your time again, what would you have done?" He said: "I would have fled!" I have always understood his reply to mean that he could not have considered himself worthy to accept such a stupendous grace and responsibility as the priesthood. In this, he followed the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who declined the priesthood out of humility.

Perhaps it is just as well that we did not know these things when, as naïve boys or young men, we offered ourselves for the seminary. Perhaps we too would have had the humility to turn aside. We come to know these wonders at a point in our lives when we have, hopefully, grown into a reverence for the wonders of the mysteries of our faith, through learning and prayer.

Mother rejoices...

Up to now, we have been listening to the words of the Pope to have the doctrine, for this is a question so deep and delicate that one feels the need of the support of his magisterium. But it is precisely the wonder of this reality which explains our Mother's concern for the priesthood. We have said that our Mother, at the heart of the Cenacle in Jerusalem and in our own cenacles too, has looked on the young men placed in Her care because chosen by Her Son. She saw the so ordinary human frailty of Her new sons, side by side with the wonder of their call. Her reaction is extraordinary and marvellous:

"You ask Me if I am pleased. Oh, you do not know, My son, the joy that you give Me! It is a mother's joy to be with her children. My paradise is that of being close to each one of you. The priests are children whom I love *in a special way because, by their vocation, they are called to be Jesus*".
(M. 40, 23rd. February 1974)

That "special love" marks them out for the very reason of which we have spoken "because, by their vocation, they are called to be Jesus". When our Mother looks upon a priest, one of ourselves, She sees not just him in his humanity, but also Her Son Jesus, alive and living and acting in him She sees the poverty of the material the Lord has chosen, *who carry a great treasure in vessels of clay*, as St. Paul tells us. That poverty has been entrusted to Her as our Mother, towards Whom we must be little children:

"It is My duty to form the image of My Son in them. I never abandon them. I never leave them alone." (ibid). "Well now: the Priests of My movement must be all like this. Because they have consecrated themselves to Me, they must feel, see and think as I do, together with Me, because I want to take complete possession of their life. I want to transform it, and make it an image of My Son Jesus, the First Born of so many other sons of mine. They must let themselves be formed by Me, as little children, with much trust and abandonment!"
(M. 22, 20th. October 1973)

Some time ago, a layman friend of mine, with whom, I had been discussing the supernatural nature of the priesthood in these terms, asked me whether the knowledge of such things made a difference in the lives of priests. Clearly, there are some, indeed many, for whom such a realisation makes a deep impression on the way in which they live their priestly lives. But, sadly, it is also true that, for many there is little reflection on such things. Such matters are to be learned and absorbed only in prayer, and perhaps a little of our Mother's concern in this matter can be found in that well-known message where She tells us:

"It is not your pastoral plans and your discussions, it is not the human means in which you place your trust and so much security, But it is only Jesus in the Eucharist Who will the entire Church the strength for a complete renewal which will bring it to be poor, evangelical, chaste, stripped of all the supports in which it trusts, holy, beautiful, without stain and spot, in imitation of your Heavenly Mother". (M.330, 8th. August 1986)

We can become so absorbed by organisational concerns, our human expertise and ways of doing things that our concept of our faith can owe less to Faith and more to human efficiency. As the Holy Father tells us, the ordained ministry can never be reduced simply to the level of function. We may wonder at the way in which many have been taught in the seminaries prior to ordination.

Perhaps, if the immensity of the gift contained in the priesthood had been more widely understood and appreciated, less priests might have been prepared to leave their vocations. And so our Mother wishes to bring back a renewal in the priesthood, to bring the lives of Her sons to conform to the extraordinary gift within them.

"It is My duty to form the image of My Son in them. I never abandon them. I never leave them alone".
(M.40, 23rd. February 1974)

It is the task She accomplishes in that perpetual Cenacle of Her Immaculate Heart, and She is the Teacher in the light of the Holy Spirit, Whose Bride She is and, in Whom She is the Mediatrix of all Graces. Within the Cenacle, which is the planned home for the renewed Church, there must be a renewed priesthood which is to be its heart. She Who formed the One Eternal High Priest will do the same for us in that same forum in which Jesus grew up, that is, Her Immaculate Heart. For this Her Heart itself was formed and grew as the foremost disciple of Jesus, the mirror-image of His own Heart, thus becoming the Mother with the Priestly Heart.

We come to Her, seeking to be formed in an expression of our priesthood which is interiorly the echo of Her own Heart, because She cannot fail to imprint the image of Jesus in us. "*The Mother kept these things in Her Heart, pondering them*", St. Luke repeats twice in one chapter of his Gospel, indicating that all that Jesus said and did became the "shape" of Her own Heart. He was all She had, and all She has to give us, and He entrusted us to Her. Total entrustment to Her is the defence which God gives us in these times:

"I am bringing you to Jesus, your Life. This is why today, when many are falling into the darkness of sin and of death, I am helping you through My strong presence in your midst, to live in the grace of God, so that you also can share in the very life of the Lord Jesus. In these dark times of the great tribulation, if you do not allow yourselves to be carried in My arms, with filial abandonment and with great docility, only with difficulty can you avoid the subtle snares which My adversary holds out to you. His seductions have become so dangerous and crafty that it is almost impossible to avoid them. You run the great danger of falling

into the seduction which My adversary holds out to you, in order to drive you away from Jesus and from Me. Everyone can fall into his snare. Priests and even bishops fall into it. The faithful and even consecrated persons fall into it. Simple people and even learned ones fall into it. Disciples and even masters fall into it. Those never fall into it who, like little children, consecrate themselves to My Immaculate Heart and allow themselves to be borne in My mother's arms. It will now appear increasingly clear to the Church and to the world that the little flock which, in these years of the great apostasy, will remain faithful to Jesus and His Gospel, will be completely guarded in the motherly enclosure of My Immaculate Heart". (M.398, 2nd. February 1989)

This is surely a matter of experience. Certainly, in England I am convinced that those who consecrate themselves to our Mother and live it are the true backbone of the Catholic Church in the country, and I found a similar view recently in other countries while visiting. She keeps them close to Her own Immaculate Heart in love, very close to the Holy Father and the teaching of the Church and sensitive to the abuses which they see. They love the Church and, as is necessary to live at the heart of the Church, they love the priesthood and pray for it. Above all, as one archbishop said to me in Australia, She leads them to prayer, and in this we remember the gift of the Cenacle which surround the world, as we have seen, in the net of love. It was Her promise as the Movement began:

"I will cause them to experience a great love for the Church and for the Pope, whom I love so dearly and who will be comforted, defended and saved by the cohort of My Priests". (M.9,29th. July 1973)

In this way, our Mother is not simply the defence of the Church, but the source of its spiritual life in the Holy Spirit. In all this we see the spirit of the Immaculate Heart already alive in the heart of the Church: "My beloved sons, look with My eyes and you will see how the Church is being renewed interiorly, under the powerful action of the Spirit of God. Enter with Me into the Heart of the Church. Here the triumph of My Heart has already taken place It has taken place in the lives of My beloved sons who are consecrated to My Immaculate Heart. Their number increases from day to day. See, the light increases within them, as does love, faithfulness, holiness and heroic witnessing to the Gospel. Even in their littleness, My light shines forth in them. Led and formed by Me, they will be the new apostles for the renewal of the whole Church. They are in the Heart of the Church and of your Heavenly Mother". (M. 158, 5th. August 1978)

In this message of the 5th. August 1978, our Mother lists the various groups of Her children in whom Her Triumph can already be seen, namely the Holy Father and priests, consecrated religious and laity. It does not mean that Her ultimate Triumph is not to come in a major and universal event, but that a strong, if still largely hidden, work of triumphant renewal is gently spreading in the Church. The prayer of the Movement is not in vain, even though, in the present darkness, many can be tempted to questioning and disappointment. She is preparing the ground, through these triumphs at individual level, to establish Her remnant for the final struggle and to welcome Her Divine Son in the Ultimate Triumph of His Eucharistic Reign. But, if this is directed at all of those who live their consecration, it is directed in a particular way to the priests, with whom this meditation is concerned. To us She has given this promise:

"My motherly duty is that of making Jesus live in each one of you, to His very fullness. Never before as in these difficult times is it so necessary that all Priests be Jesus alone, lived and living, to be once again the light of all the nations. His merciful eyes in your eyes; His divine Heart in your heart; His soul in your soul, His love in your love, to spread everywhere in the Church the fullness of this light. To be His glory, which through you must be reflected in every part of the world". (M.220, 2nd. February 1981)

This is the work which our Mother is carrying out in each one of us who truly seeks to live his consecration to the full.

"In the harshest of winters, you are the buds which are opening up from My Immaculate Heart, and which I am placing on the branches of the Church, to tell you that its most beautiful spring is about to arrive. It will be for it the Second Pentecost. For this reason I invite you to repeat often in the Cenacles the prayer which I have asked of you: "Come Holy Spirit, come by means of the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Your well-beloved Spouse". (M.604, 31st. December 1997)

Michel Gaughran SSC

MSM - INTERNATIONAL SPIRITUAL EXERCICES
Collevalenza - Santuario dell'Amore Misericordioso

24 Juni-30 Juni 2007