

**THE PRIEST CONSECRATED TO THE IMMACULATE HEART
OF MARY IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH**

In the Commitments we Make

INTRODUCTION – CONSECRATION TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

In the early messages of the Book, we find:

“If all the Priests of My Movement only knew with what care they have been chosen and moulded by Me to prepare them for this great task! ... every detail of their life – even the most insignificant – has a precise and profound meaning. Therefore let each one become accustomed to read with Me in the stupendous book of their own existence. I will give them Wisdom of heart, and they will understand with Me the reason for all that concerns them”.
(M. 29, 19th. December 1973)

A Retreat such as this is the occasion for such a gaze, because we are called to go inwards with Mary, and for this a certain silence is required. It is not the moment for ingenious presentations or theological speculations or analyses, but for growth in communion of spirit with the Heart of our Mother, growth in confidence in Her work in us and so to build strength for everything which may await us. It is in this spirit that we make our commitment.

Our commitments in the Marian Movement of Priests are generally expressed as three: first, total consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; second, unity with and love and prayer for the Holy Father and, third, to bring the faithful entrusted to our care to a renewed devotion to our Holy Mother.

And it is good to review and meditate these commitments when we live in a world which threatens our very human existence and the well-being of the Church. We are priests made precisely for these times by a very special dispensation of the Most Holy Mother. True, this can be said of every person and every priest born into these times but, in the eternal plan of God, each one of those who are consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary has a very special place in the Church of to-day from Her They are chosen by Mary, moulded and prepared by Mary and exist for the fulfilment of the plans of Her Immaculate Heart. In that same message we find:

"I have chosen you from your infancy and have always led you by the hand. Never have I abandoned you, even when My adversary attacked you and snatched you from Me, and was then sure of having conquered once for all. Because of this you have had to suffer much; you have had to walk often in darkness and abandonment, almost despairing that I had heard your wails and your cries for help. But all of this was part of My great plan: you seem now to have some glimpse of it, and your heart is filled with joy. But that which is more beautiful, more important, My son, is yet to come. I have chosen you and prepared you for the Triumph of My Immaculate Heart in the world, and these are the years when I will bring My plan to completion". (ibid.)

Formed in a plan of love in which, even if we have been unfaithful, we have never been abandoned by our Mother: the children of Mercy. In the "stupendous book of our existence", we find the gift of our Catholic homes, the example of others, our Catholic education, our vocation, and the miracle of the Priesthood and the call to consecrate ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Even in the midst of so many failures, sins, so much need of forgiveness, and yet all of that was accompanied by exceptional graces, the life of the sacraments, which spoke of a gratuitous motherly determination to lead us to a very special place in a great Work: the Triumph of the Immaculate.

"On your response depends whether I will be able to count on you in the great battle against Satan and his powerful army, which has already begun. I have told you that each of you has his post, prepared by Me, a post which is unique and irreplaceable. Do not ask Me what your post is, or how I am making use of you, or where I am leading you, because the particular role which each one must carry out has, through My motherly love, been assigned to each and all of you. And in silence and humility, each one must carry out this role to perfection". (M. 179, 29th. July 1979)

It is a fact which causes us to be very humble and little, when we reflect that, for this, our Mother promises to take us individually and mould us according to the movements of Her own Heart. In fact, we may liken our situation to that of the Infant Jesus Himself: it is our privilege to share in His chosen experience of life as a Child, as He learned everything from the Heart of His Mother, in Whom was stored every grace, in order to form Him to a human perfection prepared for a divine Person. In these last times, He shares this with us as a foretaste of His renewal of the Church in the Heart of Mary. That Church is to be evangelical, following His Gospel, and marian,

just as you can say that Jesus was always marian! He became little, to receive everything from Her:

"The Word of the Father, the Creator God, all powerful and all knowing, willed to be clothed in weakness and imposed upon Himself the limitation of time; He assumed for Himself the weakness of human nature, He was born of Me; like every little boy, He experienced every need". (M.258, 2nd. February 1983): and for those who are His Priests, called to live in persona Christi, the very same spirit of life must be theirs too:

"Beloved sons, called to imitate Jesus in all things because you are His ministers, imitate Him also in this complete entrusting of Himself to the Heavenly Mother. Because of this, I ask you to offer yourselves to Me with your consecration. I will be able to be an attentive and concerned Mother for you, in order to make you grow in God's plans, to fulfil in your lives the great gift of the Priesthood to which you have been called; every day I will lead you to an increasingly perfect imitation of Jesus, Who must be your only Model and your greatest Love. You will be His true instruments, and His faithful cooperators in His Redemption". (M. 287, 25th. March 1984)

This must be the joy of every priest who has consecrated himself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary: that, if he cooperates with the graces She is giving Him, He will be enabled to live his Priesthood, in all the weakness of his humanity, in a very special atmosphere of grace which is nothing less than the purity and goodness of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We see how this forms a central key to the restoration of the world by Jesus. The grace flows from Him, Who mediates His gifts to us through the Immaculate Heart of His Mother to Whom that Work of restoration is entrusted. In such a Work, a Work of exceptional grace, humanity alone is helpless and so our way is that of total abandonment to the Mother of all Grace. This, our consecration, is the first of the three commitments we make, commitments of which we must be very sure.

UNITY WITH, LOVE AND PRAYER, FOR THE HOLY FATHER

If our consecration is our first undertaking in the Marian Movement of Priests, the second is unity with and prayer and love for the Holy Father. It is because our Mother conceived Her Movement as a service to the Church: *The M.M.P. is a little seed planted by Our Lady in the garden of the Church. It very quickly became a great tree, which has spread its branches into every part of the world. It is*

a Work of love, which the Immaculate Heart of Mary is causing to spring up in the Church today, to help all Her children to live, with trust and filial hope, through the painful times of the purification (Introduction: section "Spirituality").

This particular commitment, so desired by our Mother, illustrates how She has planned Her Movement for these precise times in which we have lived. Pope Paul VI once said that the time was approaching in which loyalty to the institutional Church – the Holy Father, the Hierarchy – would be required to the point of heroism, by which I presume he meant even to the point of martyrdom. We have reached that point - we remember Father Nazareno Lanciotti, dying on the feast of the Chair of St. Peter (the feast of the institutional Church), offering his life for Our Lady and for the Church. When we think of the Holy Father, we think of him as, in one sense, synonymous with the Church, as it cannot fully exist without him. When we pray for the Holy Father's intentions, as the Church has always asked us to do (for example, in seeking a plenary indulgence), it means, in effect, that we pray for the needs of the Church itself, as his intentions are for those needs, which he understands much better than any other of its members. This commitment is intended to unite us deeply into the heart of the Church: to be, as St. Thérèse, "Love in the heart of the Church".

In this context, it is worth remembering that, at the Second Vatican Council, there were those of high rank who were determined to interpret the word "collegiality" as meaning that the decisions of a majority of bishops would bind the Church, even against the wishes of the Pope. When Pope Paul heard of this, he commanded that there be inserted, at the end of "Lumen Gentium", an addendum, making clear that the college of bishops could not exist without the Pope at its head, nor act without his consent: there is no such thing as the body without the head.

Our Mother, setting out the commitments we make in the Movement, by which She offers us Her own spirit, seeks to lead us to share Her own motherly love for the Church, that this should be our own, through a very close union with the Holy Father. In these days, in which there is so much presumption, and many ideas and practices

are in the Church contrary to his, when his words are often ignored and his person is criticised cruelly, this union with the Pope is necessary for the life and the defence of the Church itself.

It is also the defence of Truth, for only his word carries the infallible right to instruct the whole Church. Without him, we would have no guarantee of truth. The attack on his place in the College of Bishops was one of the greatest threats to the Church of our times, and that attack goes on, in various forms, in attacks on or attempts to denigrate the Holy Father.

THIS POPE ...

But we have a special privilege in having Pope John Paul II personally as our Holy Father. He too is our Mother's special gift for these times, because each Pope is a providence for his times.

"I obtained from God for the Church the Pope who had been prepared and formed by Me. He has solemnly consecrated himself to My Immaculate Heart and has solemnly entrusted the Church to Me, Who am its Mother and Queen. In the person and the work of the Holy Father, John Paul II, I am reflecting My great Light which will become stronger the more the darkness envelops everything". (M.167, 1st. January 1979)

With him has come, in some ways, a new style of exercising his great office. We are accustomed to think of the Successor of St. Peter as the great defender of the deposit of Catholic Doctrine and, as such, as universal Teacher. In recent times, he appears to have embarked on something else, that is, his teaching has been concentrated on our souls, our interior life. As we entered into the Millennium celebrations, he asked that the entire pastoral activity and initiatives should be set in the context of personal holiness. One might say: that is not surprising, for that holiness is the heart of the Church always. Yes, but one has the impression that he has directed his pontificate to this in a way never done before particularly with his meetings with young people. A Church less cerebral, more spiritual. In a way, you could say that he was acting as a universal spiritual director for the Church.

That call to holiness is universal. When the Holy Father speaks of prayer, he speaks of it in terms of the prayer of every man and woman, not in terms of the more difficult language sometimes to be

found in the big books of the seminary libraries, but as something possible to the simplest of God's people and to families:

"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". (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 31)

This became crystallised when, in the year just past, he published "Rosarium Virginis Mariae", drawing us back to the simple roots of prayer, in the families. Indeed, simplicity appears as the mark of our Holy Father, in harmony with the simplicity of our Heavenly Mother. We feel at home with this teaching as we look at the Cenacles She has given us, surrounding the world with a prayer which has the Rosary at its centre. He has given us this year of the Rosary also and the new mysteries, which he has called "Mysteries of Light". There is also the Encyclical on the Eucharist: the heart of every interior life. Indeed one wonders whether he is binding the ship of the Church to the two great pillars surmounted by Our Lady and the Eucharist as in St. John Bosco's vision.

It is hardly surprising if the Marian Movement of Priests finds itself completely at home with this particular Holy Father. Both the Movement and he are given to us as remedies for the ills of our times. Both are rooted in the consecration of ourselves to Mary's Immaculate Heart. It is John Paul's personal spiritual way, but we remember also the occasions on which he has consecrated the entire Church to Her (for example on 7th October of the Jubilee Year), how he invited every single member of the Church to do with same with their own life during the Marian Year and how, on Holy Thursday of that same year, he asked every priest in the Church to do the same with his Priesthood. If all had followed that request, how different would have been the situation today!

We feel at home too when we look at the many saints he has canonised and beatified, and we see a notable presence of the "little ones". We remember particularly the Blessed Jacinta and Francisco, Blessed Juan Diego, and we remember how the "supreme little one, St. Teresina, was elevated to being Doctor of the Church. So many resonances in his magisterium of the voice of Mother Mary in the Messages! The Mother Who is so at home with Her little ones.

All of this is what our Mother speaks of when She says, as we have heard, that She is reflecting Her great Light through Him, and that it will grow stronger the more the darkness envelops everything (M. 167, 1st. January 1979). Now the darkness has come to envelop everything, and the Holy Father's voice is teaching us strongly. It is the Light of the Immaculate Heart which comes with his example and direction, so that, in the magisterium of the Church, we hear, through Her Pope, that Mother to Whom He has entrusted the Church and the papacy itself (we remember the gift of his ring to Her at Fatima on the occasion of the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta). Even the new mysteries of the Rosary are the "Mysteries of Light" (luminosi).

A new Church, conceived in the Immaculate Heart of Mary

A CRUSADE ...

The Holy Father's advocacy of the Holy Rosary reminds us too of the power of the Rosary in defending the Church against Satan's attacks, of which our Mother has spoken many times in the Messages:

"The Chain with which the great dragon has to be bound is formed by prayer offered with Me and through Me. This prayer is that of the Holy Rosary. A chain has, in fact, the task, first of all, of limiting action, then of imprisoning and, finally, of rendering useless all activity on the part of the one who has been bound by it". (M. 479, 7th. October 1992)

The Holy Father, in his letter on the Rosary, describes it as "an effective spiritual weapon against the evils affecting society (Rosarium, 2). He refers to it in the context of the events of the 11th September and of the many acts of terrorism which are afflicting the present world. This leads to the reflection that, in instituting the Year of the Holy Rosary, the Pope made it clear that he was not merely reinforcing the devotion to the Holy Rosary, but launching a crusade of the Rosary for the needs of the Church and of humanity in the present – the comparison with Lepanto comes readily to mind.

Just as Mother Mary's institution of the Marian Movement of Priests is itself a call to battle, so also is the Holy Father's call to the Year of the Rosary. In this, we belong together with him. The commitment we make of prayer, love and unity with the Holy

Father is something far deeper than the loyalty to the Holy See which is the duty of every Catholic, but rather speaks of a union in the heart of the Church, our Mother's Church.

In speaking of the darkness (the night) which has come upon the world, Our Mother says:

"The Pope suffers and prays: he is on a cross which is consuming and killing him. This time he has again spoken but his voice falls on a desert. My Church has become more barren than a desert. You Priests, whom I am now gathering into My Movement to check this advance of satan, you must with the Pope, form a strong barrier. You must propagate his word, you must defend him, because he will have to carry the Cross in the midst of the greatest storm in history". (M.14, 28th. August 1973)

These words, given in the reign of Pope Paul VI, undoubtedly apply with equal force, if not greater, to his successor, John Paul II.

THE MOTHER LEADS US TO THE VOICE OF THE POPE

Our Holy Father entrusted the Church to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and we have seen how She has told us that Her great light radiates into a darkened world. How does it radiate? As we have seen, our Mother is speaking to the Church, "of which She is Mother and Queen", through the voice of the Holy Father. His voice is Hers, because it belongs to Her and therefore bears Her Light. She then tells us:

"How can the Mother publicly criticise the decisions of the Pope" (as some had suggested that She did not favour his teachings) "when he alone has the special grace for the exercise of this sublime ministry? I was silent at My Son's voice; I was silent at the voice of the Apostles. I am now lovingly silent at the voice of the Pope that it might be disseminated more and more, that it might be heard by all, that it might be received into souls. And so I am very close to the person of this first of My beloved sons, the Vicar of My Son Jesus. By My silence, I am helping him to speak. By My silence, I am lending strength to his own words. Return, return, My Priest-sons, to love, obedience and communion with the Pope! Only in this way can you hear My orders, which I will give you through the very voice of My Pope Only in this way can you fight along with Me for the assured victory, otherwise you are already marching towards defeat (...) I will clothe you with My own docility and you will be ever obedient, I will thus make you instruments fit for this battle of mine and you will see in the end My queenly victory". (M. 108, 22nd. August 1976)

It is, I believe, a very important passage, as it illustrates just where our belonging to the Marian Movement of Priests is leading us: in the days in which, as we have seen, many choose to separate themselves from the voice of the Church or even, while remaining nominally within it, presume to substitute their own views for the voice of the Pope, our Mother tells us that She wishes to draw us closer into the Church, to be identified with the Church by being the voice of the Pope (in turn the voice of the Mother). The only destination of the baptised is to belong to the Church, and our Mother's Movement cannot be separated from it. Some see the Movement as a "marian devotion", but it is not just that; through the consecration of its members to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Queen and Mother of the Church, the Movement seals us in true unity with the Church, restoring what satan has sought to divide. The voice of the Mother in the messages has gone silent, leaving us the guidance of the Pope. "By My silence, I am helping him to speak."

It is in this way that our Mother can speak of the ultimate destination of Her consecrated Priests to be this:

"The Most Holy Trinity has stooped over you with delight and God has given you the grace of change of heart. In place of your little hearts, filled with sins, I have put My Immaculate Heart. Now be the heart of the new Church, which Jesus is forming every day in the garden of His divine and merciful love". (M.575, 27th. June 1996)

It is possible to hear the joy of the Mother in this passage which synthesizes everything we have been saying.

TO LEAD THE FAITHFUL TO A GREATER DEVOTION TO OUR MOTHER

We said that the third commitment which we make in the Movement is that we will lead the faithful entrusted to our care to a renewed devotion to our Mother. Yet, at the same time, its spirit is not simply a "marian devotion".

So what is the devotion of which the Marian Movement speaks? It is not "a devotion" in the sense of a commitment to a certain pattern of prayers, but rather a personal love and commitment and, more important, a commitment to share the same thoughts, intentions, desires and share in the same plan of life. We are called to be the faithful transmitters of the Will of our Heavenly Mother in Her plan

of action for the renewal and salvation of the world. For this, we are asked to be those who listen to Her words in Her messages but, first of all, to the word of Her Pope who, as we have seen, speaks in Her name. Our teaching must be attuned to these sources, so as to form the faithful entrusted to our care in the voice of Mary, speaking in the Church. We become Her voice:

"I am here to form you to a life lived with Me. Because, through your consecration, you have entrusted yourselves to Me, I can now truly live and manifest Myself in you especially when, as Priests, you speak to My children. It is the Holy Spirit Who suggests everything to you. But it is the Mother Who gives word and form to all that the Spirit prompts you to say, so that you may reach the hearts and minds of those who listen to you, according to their capacity to receive and their spiritual need". (M. 129, 14th. July 1977)

In a message given before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, She tells us:

"Just as in My eyes the image of little Juan Diego, to whom I appeared, is impressed, so also you are impressed in the eyes and the heart of your Heavenly Mother. *You are the pupil of My eyes*, because you are My littlest children, completely consecrated to Me, and so I can pour out upon you all the tenderness of My motherly love. *You are the pupil of My eyes*, because you have let yourselves be led by Me with so much docility. You listen to Me, you follow out My requests, you walk along the road which I have traced out for you and so, through you, I can bring about the great plan of the triumph of My Immaculate Heart, with so much docility. You listen to Me, you follow out My requests, you walk along the road which I have traced out for you and so, through you, I can bring about the great plan of the triumph of My Immaculate Heart. *You are the pupil of My eyes*, because through you I can spread the light of faith in the days of the great apostasy, the perfume of grave and holiness in the time of the great perversion and the victorious power of love in the hour of violence and hatred". (M. 532, 5th. December 1994)

We find here something immensely rich. The Marian Movement of Priests exists, not to be a Movement "apart", but deeply embedded in the reality of the Church. If it is the voice of the Mother for which we long and by which we were privileged in Her messages for many years, She has now entered into that silence which She observed in the presence of the voice of Her Son during His time on earth and that of the Apostles while they carried on His ministry

(it is a demonstration of our Mother's humility). She puts the Church forward. She placed in the Church a spirit (that of Her own Immaculate Heart) to enrich our living of the Church but, in the end, we live by faith and not by messages, and so She leaves us to the teaching magisterium of the Church. It is not that in, being silent, She has ceased to exercise Her influence upon us but rather continues to do so in a more hidden way. She does so through the Church of which She is Mother and Queen, to Whom the Church has been entrusted by our Holy Father and through His words in the papal ministry which he entrusted to Her, as a little child, when he entrusted His ring to Her on the eve of the beatification of Blessed Jacinta and Francisco. Is there no more? Of course there is. There is that quiet, motherly care which She exercises upon every soul which has consecrated itself to Her Immaculate Heart and tries to live that consecration, but also the light which should flow from the priests who have made that consecration and who hold it in trust also for their people. Let us always remember that we are those who carry the light of Mary, which is in the Church, because our priesthood is given to Her. In other retreats, we have seen something which She repeats often in Her Messages:

And here is one reason why repeatedly, as we have seen many times in other retreats, She asks us to do everything with Her, so as to foster that total union with Herself. My life becomes Hers and the bearer of Her light. Because, if we do everything with Her, She does everything with us. What a transformation, what a privilege! It is something we must believe in on Her word, and live on the basis that it is true, and encourage that word in us by reading, meditating and seeking to live what She tells us, the programme She has given us in the messages (M. 604, 31st. December 1997).

Then all that we do within the Church becomes Her work in us. When we lead our people to the Eucharist, She leads them with us; in our teaching and preaching of the Faith, She accompanies us, in our pastoral care, it is She Who watches over our people.

But, in all of this, Her voice remains silent, as She has told us it did in the presence and teaching of Her Son and of the Apostles, but that does not mean She is not present and active. Our Mother has a

profound respect and reverence for the Church, the Body of Her Son, and for its shepherds, but She, at its heart and as its inspiration, wishes to support and guide it in Her silence, through hearts which have opened themselves to Her motherly action: Her Pope, the Church consecrated to Her, Her priests. It is for us to remain close to Her Immaculate Heart.

"My motherly plan is that of protecting the whole of humanity in the painful time of its salvation. The time is close at hand when Justice will be wedded to the divine Mercy, for the purification of the earth. Prepare yourselves, all of you, to bear the pain of the great purifying trial. You are the rays of light, coming down from My Immaculate Heart, in order to shed light upon the painful hours of the merciful punishment. Shed light upon the hours of obscurity and of the great darkness which has come upon the world, with My motherly and merciful light. Give the ointment of My motherly tenderness to the little ones, the poor, the sinners, to the sick and those far off. I want to live in you and to act through you. The remedy which I am giving for the salvation of all, in the culminating moment of the great trial, is Myself, and I will show Myself to all, to the Church and to the world, through you, little sons called by Me and formed by Me for this great task I now entrust to you all. So enter, all of you, into the safe refuge of My Immaculate Heart and never leave it again....The Most Holy Trinity has stooped over you with delight and God has given you the gift of change of heart. In place of your little hearts, filled with sins, I have put My Immaculate Heart. Now be the new heart of the new Church, which Jesus is forming every day in the garden of His divine and merciful love".

(M. 575, 27th. June 1996)

Sursum Corda!

Michael Gaughran SSC

MARIAN MOVEMENT OF PRIESTS

International Retreat for Priests

Santuario dell'Amore Misericordioso - Collevaenza (Todi - PG) --- 29 giugno - 5 luglio 2003

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