



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL I**

**TO THE ROMAN CLERGY** *Thursday, 7 September 1978*

I heartily thank the Cardinal Vicar for the good wishes that he addressed to me on behalf of all those present. I know what a faithful and precious help he was to my unforgettable predecessor and I hope he will continue the same collaboration for me. I greet affectionately Monsignor the Vicegerent, the Auxiliary Bishops, the Officials of the various Centres and Offices of the Vicariate, and then all the individual priests in care of souls within the diocese and its district: the parish priests in the first place, their co-workers, the religious, and, through them, Christian families and the faithful.

## **According to the Gospel**

You may have noted that, already when speaking to the Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, I mentioned the "great discipline of the Church" to be "preserved in the lives of priests and of the faithful." My revered predecessor often spoke on this subject; allow me to talk to you very briefly about it with brotherly familiarity, at this first meeting.

There is the "little" discipline, which is limited to purely external and formal observance of juridical norms. I would like, on the contrary, to speak of the "great" discipline. The latter exists only if external observance is the fruit of deep convictions and the free and joyful projection of a life lived deeply with God. It is a question—Abbé Chautard writes—of the activity of a soul which reacts continually to master its bad inclinations and to acquire, a little at a time, the habit of judging and behaving in all the circumstances of life according to the maxims of the Gospel and the examples of Jesus. "To master inclinations" is discipline. The phrase "a little at a time" indicates discipline, which requires a continued, long, and difficult effort. Even the angels that Jacob saw in a dream were not flying, but climbing one step at a time; you can just imagine us, poor men without wings.

The "great" discipline requires a suitable atmosphere; and, in the first place, meditation. At Milan station I once saw a porter, who, with his head resting on a sack of coal propped against a pillar, was sound asleep... Trains left whistling and arrived with clanking wheels the loudspeakers

continually boomed out announcements; people came and went in confusion and noise, but he—sleeping on—seemed to be saying: "Do what you like, but I need to be quiet." We priests should do something similar: around us there is continual movement and talking, of persons, newspapers, radio and television. With priestly moderation and discipline we must say: "Beyond certain limits, for me, who am a priest of the Lord, you do not exist. I must take a little silence for my soul. I detach myself from you to be united with my God."

And today it is the desire of many good faithful to feel their priest habitually united with God. They reason like the lawyer of Lyons on his return from a visit to the Curé d'Ars. "What did you see at Ars?" he was asked. Answer: "I saw God in a man". St Gregory the Great reasons in a similar way. He hopes that the pastor of souls will dialogue with God without forgetting men, and dialogue with men without forgetting God. And he goes on: "Let the pastor avoid the temptation of wishing to be loved by the faithful instead of by God, or of being too weak for fear of losing men's affection; let him not lay himself open to the divine reproach: 'Woe to those who sew magic bands upon all wrists' (Ez13:18)." "The pastor," he concludes, "must indeed try to make himself loved, but in order to win a hearing, not to seek this affection for his own profit" (cf. *Regula Pastoralis*, 1.II, c. VIII).

To a certain degree all priests are guides and pastors; but have they all the right idea of what it really means to be pastor of a particular Church, that is a Bishop? On the one hand, Jesus, the Supreme Pastor, said of himself: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:19). And on the other hand he added: "I came to serve" (cf. Mt 20:28), and he washed his Apostles' feet. In him, therefore, power and service went together.

Something similar should be said of the Apostles and Bishops. "Praesumus", Augustine said, "si prosumus (*Miscellanea Augustiniana*, Rome 1930, t. I, p. 565)"; we Bishops preside, if we serve: our presidency is just if it consists of service or takes place for the purpose of service, with the spirit and style of service. This episcopal service would be lacking, however, if the Bishop did not wish to exercise the powers received. Augustine said further: "the Bishop who does not serve the public (by preaching, guiding) is only *foeneus custos*, a scarecrow put in the vineyards so that the birds will not peck the grapes" (*Ibid.*, p. 568). For this reason it is written in *Lumen Gentium*: "Bishops govern ... by their counsel, exhortations, and example, as well, indeed, as by their authority and sacred power" (*Lumen Gentium*, 27).

## Pastoral service

Another element of priestly discipline is love of one's own job. It is not easy, I know, to love one's job and stick to it when things are not going right, when one has the impression that one is not understood or encouraged, when inevitable comparisons with the job given to others would drive us to become sad and discouraged. But are we not working for the Lord? Ascetical theology teaches: do not look *at whom* you obey, but *for Whom* you obey. Reflection helps too. I have been a bishop for twenty years. On several occasions I suffered because I was unable to reward

someone who really deserved it; but either the prize position was lacking or I did not know how to replace the person, or adverse circumstances occurred. Then, too, St Francis of Sales wrote: "There is no vocation that does not have its troubles, its vexations, its disgust. Apart from those who are fully resigned to God's will. each of us would like to change his own condition with that of others. Those who are bishops wish they were not; those who are married wish they were not, and those who are not married wish that they were. Where does this general restlessness of spirits come from, if not from a certain allergy that we have towards constraint and from a spirit that is not good, which make us suppose that others are better off than we are?" (St Francis of Sales, *Oeuvres*, edit. Annecy, t. XII, 348-9).

I have spoken simply and I apologize for it. I can assure you, however, that since I have become your Bishop I love you a great deal. And it is with a heart full of love that I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.