



The Holy See

MEETING OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI WITH THE PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF ALBANO

*Swiss Hall at the Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 31 August 2006*

Some problems for priests

Fr Giuseppe Zane, Vicar "ad omnia", 83 years old:

Our Bishop, if briefly, has described to you the situation of our Diocese of Albano. We priests are fully integrated into this Church and experience all the relative problems and complexities. Young and old, we all feel inadequate. This is firstly because we are so few in comparison with the many needs and we come from different backgrounds; we also suffer from a shortage of priestly vocations. That is why we sometimes feel discouraged. We try to patch things up here and there and are often forced to attend only to emergencies, without any precise projects. Seeing how much there is to do, we are tempted to give priority to "doing" and to neglect "being"; this is inevitably reflected in our spiritual life, our conversation with God, our prayer and our charity (love) for our brethren, especially those who are far away. Holy Father, what can you tell us about this? I am a certain age... but is it possible for these young confreres of mine to hope?

Benedict XVI:

Dear Brothers, I would like first of all to offer you a word of welcome and thanks: thanks to Cardinal Sodano for his presence, with which he expresses his love and care for this Suburbicarian Church; thanks to you, Your Excellency, for your words. In a few sentences, you have presented to me the situation of this Diocese with which I was not so well acquainted. I knew that it was the largest of the Suburbicarian Dioceses, but I did not know that its population had increased to 500,000. Thus, I see a Diocese full of challenges and difficulties but certainly also full of joy in the faith. And I see that all the issues of our time are present: emigration, tourism,

marginalization, agnosticism, but also a firm faith.

I have no claim to be, as it were, an "oracle" that could respond adequately to every question. St Gregory the Great's words, which you quoted, Your Excellency, which everyone knows, "*infirmiorem suam*", also apply to the Pope. Day after day, the Pope too must know and recognize "*infirmiorem suam*", his shortcomings. He must recognize that only in collaboration with everyone, in dialogue, in common cooperation, in faith as "*cooperatores veritatis*" - of the Truth that is a Person, Jesus -, can we carry out our service together, each one doing his share. This means that my answers will not be exhaustive but piecemeal. Yet, let us agree that actually it is only in unison that we can piece together the "mosaic" of a pastoral work that responds to the immense challenges.

Cardinal Sodano, you said that our dear confrere, Fr Zane, seems somewhat pessimistic. However, I have to say that each one of us has moments of discouragement in the face of all that needs to be done, and the limits of what, instead, can realistically be done. Once again, this also concerns the Pope. What must I do at this time for the Church, with so many problems, so many joys, so many challenges that concern the universal Church? So many things happen, day after day, and I am unable to respond to them all. I do my part, I do all I can. I try to identify the priorities. And I am glad that I have so many good collaborators to help me. I can already say, here at this moment: I see every day the great amount of work that the Secretariat of State does under your wise guidance. And only with this network of collaboration, fitting myself and my own limited capacities into a broader reality, can I and dare I move ahead.

Therefore, naturally, a parish priest who is on his own sees even better that so many things still need to be done in this situation which you, Fr Zane, have briefly described. And he can only do something to "patch things up", as you said, a kind of "first-aid" operation, knowing that far more ought to be done.

I would say, then, that firstly, what is necessary for all of us is to recognize our own limitations, to humbly recognize that we have to leave most things to the Lord. Today, we heard in the Gospel the Parable of the Faithful Servant (Mt 24: 42-51). This servant, the Lord tells us, gives food to the others at the proper time. He does not do everything at once but is a wise and prudent servant who knows what needs to be done in a specific situation. He does so humbly, and is also sure of his master's trust. So it is that we must likewise do our utmost to be wise and prudent and to trust in the goodness of our "Master", the Lord, for in the end it is he himself who must take the helm of his Church. We fit into her with our small gift and do the best we can, especially those things that are always necessary: celebrating the sacraments, preaching the Word, giving signs of our charity and our love.

As for the inner life you mentioned, I would say that it is essential to our service as priests. The time we set aside for prayer is not time taken from our pastoral responsibility but is precisely

pastoral "work"; it is also praying for others. In the "Common of Pastors", one reads as a typical feature of the good Pastor that "*multum oravit pro fratribus*". This is proper to the Pastor, that he should be a man of prayer, that he should come before the Lord praying for others, even replacing others who perhaps do not know how to pray, do not want to pray or do not make the time to pray. Thus, it is obvious that this dialogue with God is pastoral work!

I would say further that the Church gives us, imposes upon us - but always like a good Mother - the obligation to make free time for God with the two practices that constitute a part of our duties: the celebration of Holy Mass and the recitation of the Breviary. However, rather than reciting it, this means putting it into practice by listening to the word which the Lord offers us in the Liturgy of the Hours.

It is essential to interiorize this word, to be attentive to what the Lord is saying to me with this word, to listen, then, to the comments of the Fathers of the Church or also of the Council in the Second Reading of the Office of Readings, and to pray with this great invocation, the Psalms, by which we are inserted into the prayer of all the ages. The people of the Old Covenant pray with us, and we pray with them. We pray with the Lord, who is the true subject of the Psalms. We pray with the Church of all times. I would say that this time dedicated to the Liturgy of the Hours is precious time. The Church offers to us this freedom, this free space of life with God, which is also life for others.

Thus, it seems important to me to see that these two realities - Holy Mass truly celebrated in conversation with God and the Liturgy of the Hours - are areas of freedom, of inner life, an enrichment which the Church bestows upon us. In them, as I said, we do not only find the Church of all the ages but also the Lord himself, who speaks to us and awaits our answer. We thus learn to pray by immersing ourselves in the prayer of all times, and we also encounter the people. Let us think of the Psalms, of the words of the Prophets, of the words of the Lord and of the Apostles, let us think of the Fathers' comments.

Today, we have had St Columban's marvellous comment on Christ, the source of "living water" from which we drink. In praying, we also encounter the suffering of the People of God today. These prayers remind us of daily life and guide us in the encounter with today's people. They enlighten us in this encounter, because we do not only bring to it our own small intelligence, our love of God, but we learn through this Word of God also to bring God to them. They expect this of us: that we bring them the "living water" of which St Columban speaks today. The people are thirsty and try to satisfy this thirst with various palliatives. But they understand well that these diversions are not the "living water" that they need. The Lord is the source of "living water". But he says in chapter 7 of John that he who believes becomes a "river" because he has drunk from Christ. And this "living water" (cf. Jn 7: 38) becomes a fountain of water in us, a source for others. In this way we seek to drink it in prayer, in the celebration of Holy Mass, in reading: we seek to drink from this source so that it may become a source within us. And we can respond better to the

thirst of people today if we have within us the "living water", the divine reality, the reality of the Lord Jesus made flesh. Thus, we can respond better to the needs of our people.

This deals with the first question. What can we do? We always do all we can for the people - in the other questions, we will be able to return to this point -, and we live with the Lord in order to respond to people's true thirst.

Your second question was: *Is there any hope for this Diocese, for this portion of the People of God that makes up this Diocese of Albano, and for the Church?* I respond without hesitation: yes! Of course we have hope: the Church is alive! We have 2,000 years of the Church's history with so much suffering and even so many failures: let us think of the Church in Asia Minor and the great and flourishing Church in North Africa which disappeared with the Muslim invasion. Thus, parts of the Church can truly disappear, as St John - or the Lord through John - said in the Book of Revelation: "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (2: 5). But, on the other hand, we perceive how the Church has re-emerged from so many crises with new youth, with a new freshness.

Actually, in the century of the Reformation, the Catholic Church seemed almost to have come to her end. This new current which declared: "Now the Church of Rome is finished", seemed to triumph. And we see that with the great saints, such as Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Charles Borromeo and others, that the Church was resurrected. In the Council of Trent, she found a new actualization and the revitalization of her doctrine. And she lived again with great vitality. Let us look at the age of the Enlightenment, when Voltaire said: "At last this ancient Church is dead, humanity is alive!". And instead, what happens? The Church is renewed.

The 19th century became the century of the great saints, of new vitality for a multitude of religious congregations, and faith is stronger than all the currents that come and go. And this also happened in the past century. Hitler once said: "Providence called me, a Catholic, to have done with Catholicism. Only a Catholic can destroy Catholicism". He was sure that he had all the means to be able at last to destroy Catholicism. Likewise, the great Marxist trend was convinced that it would achieve the scientific revision of the world and open doors to the future: the Church is nearing her end, she is done for! The Church, however, is stronger, as Christ said. It is Christ's life that wins through in his Church.

Even in difficult times when there is a shortage of vocations, the Word of the Lord lives for ever. And he who, as the Lord himself said, builds his life on this "rock" of the Word of Christ, builds it well. Therefore, we can be confident. We also see new initiatives of faith in our day. We see that in Africa, despite all her problems, the Church has fresh new vocations, which is encouraging.

Thus, with all the differences of the historical prospect of today, we see - and not only see but believe - that the words of the Lord are spirit and life, they are words of eternal life. St Peter said,

as we heard last Sunday in the Gospel: "You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6: 68-69). And in looking at the Church today, together with all the suffering we see the Church's vitality, and we ourselves can also say: we have believed and have come to know that you offer us the words of eternal life, hence, a never-failing hope.

Integrated pastoral care

Mons. Gianni Macella, parish priest in Albano:

In recent years, in harmony with the project of the Italian Bishops' Conference for the decade 2000-2010, we have been striving to implement a project for "integrated pastoral care". There are many difficulties. It is worth remembering at least the fact that many of us priests are still bound to a certain not particularly mission-oriented pastoral practice which seemed to have been consolidated; it was so closely bound to a context, as people call it, "of Christianity". On the other hand, many of the requests of a large number of the faithful themselves presume the parish to be a "supermarket" of sacred services. So this is what I would like to ask you, Your Holiness: is integrated pastoral care only a question of strategy, or is there a deeper reason why we must continue to work along these lines?

Benedict XVI:

I must confess that I had to learn the term, "integrated pastoral care" from your question. However, I have understood its content: that we must strive to integrate in a single pastoral process both the different pastoral workers who exist today and the different dimensions of pastoral work. I would therefore distinguish the dimensions of the subjects of pastoral work and then attempt to integrate the whole into a single pastoral process.

In your question, you have explained that there is, shall we say, the "classic" level of work in the parish for the faithful who have stayed on - and who perhaps are also increasing - and give life to our parish. This is "classic" pastoral care and it is always important. I usually make a distinction between continuous evangelization - because faith continues, the parish survives - and the new evangelization that seeks to be missionary, to supersede the limits of those who are already "faithful" and live in the parish or who, perhaps with a "reduced" faith, make use of parish services.

In the parish, it seems to me that we have three fundamental commitments that stem from the essence of the Church and the priestly ministry.

The first is sacramental service. I would say that Baptism, its preparation and the commitment to giving continuity to the baptismal promises, already puts us in contact with those who are not convinced believers. It is not, let us say, a task of preserving Christianity, but rather an encounter

with people who may seldom go to church. The task of preparing for Baptism, of opening the hearts of parents, relatives and godparents to the reality of Baptism already can and should be a missionary commitment that goes beyond the boundaries of people who are already "faithful".

In preparation for Baptism, let us seek to make people understand that this Sacrament is insertion into God's family, that God is alive, that he cares for us. He cares for us to the point that he took on our flesh and instituted the Church, which is his Body, in which he can, so to speak, put on new flesh in our society. Baptism is a newness of life in the sense that, as well as the gift of biological life, we need the gift of a meaning for life that is stronger than death and that will endure even when, one day, the parents are no longer alive. The gift of biological life is justified only if we can add the promise of a stable meaning, of a future which, also in future crises - which we cannot know - will give value to life so that it is worth living, worth being creatures.

I think that in the preparation for this Sacrament or in conversation with parents who view Baptism with suspicion, we have a missionary situation. It is a Christian message. We must make ourselves interpreters of the reality that begins with Baptism.

I am not sufficiently familiar with the Italian Rite. In the classic Rite, inherited from the ancient Church, Baptism begins with the question: "What do you ask of God's Church?". Today, at least in the German Rite, the response is simply "Baptism". This does not adequately explain what it is that should be desired. In the ancient Rite the answer was "faith": that is, a relationship with God, acquaintanceship with God. And, "Why do you ask for faith", the Rite continues. "Because we wish for eternal life": we also want a safe life in future crises, a life that has meaning, that justifies being human. In any case, it seems to me that this dialogue should take place with the parents prior to Baptism. This is only to say that the gift of the Sacrament is not merely a "thing", it is not merely "reifying" it, as the French say; it is missionary work.

Then there is Confirmation to prepare for at the age when people also begin to make decisions with regard to faith. Of course, we must not turn Confirmation into a form of "Pelagianism", almost as if in it one became Catholic by oneself, but rather into a blending of gift and response.

Finally, the Eucharist is Christ's permanent presence in the daily celebration of Holy Mass. It is very important, as I have said, for the priest, for his priestly life, as the real presence of the gift of the Lord.

We can now also mention Marriage: Marriage too presents itself as a great missionary opportunity because today - thanks be to God - many people, even those who do not go to church often, still want to marry in church. It is an opportunity to make these young people face the reality of Christian Marriage, sacramental Marriage. This also seems to me a great responsibility. We see it in causes of the nullity of marriage, and we see it above all in the great problem of divorced and remarried people who want to receive Communion and do not understand why this is impossible.

It is more than likely that when they said their "yes" before the Lord, they did not understand what this "yes" means. It is an identification with the "yes" of Christ, it means entering into the fidelity of Christ, hence, into the sacrament that is the Church and thus, into the Sacrament of Marriage.

I therefore think that preparation for marriage is a very important missionary opportunity for proclaiming the Sacrament of Christ once again in the Sacrament of Marriage, to understand this fidelity and thereby help people to understand the problem of those who are divorced and remarried.

This is the first and "classic" section of the sacraments which gives us the opportunity to meet people who do not go to church every Sunday: hence, an opportunity for a truly missionary proclamation, for "integrated pastoral care".

The second section is the proclamation of the Word with the two essential elements: homily and catechesis.

In the Synod of Bishops last year, the Fathers spoke a lot about the homily, emphasizing how difficult it is today to find a "bridge" between the Word of the New Testament, written 2,000 years ago, and our present day. I must say that historical and critical exegesis often does not give us sufficient help in drafting the homily. I notice it myself as I try to prepare homilies that actualize the Word of God: or rather, given that the Word has an actuality in itself, that make people perceive, understand, this actuality. Historical-critical exegesis has much to tell us about the past, about the moment when the Word was born, about the meaning it had at the time of Jesus' Apostles; but it does not always give us enough help in understanding that the words of Jesus, of the Apostles and also of the Old Testament, are spirit and life: the Lord of the Old Testament also speaks today.

I think we have "to challenge" theologians - the Synod did so - to move ahead, to give parish priests greater help in preparing their homilies and in making the presence of the Word visible: the Lord speaks to me today and not only in the past.

In the last few days I have been reading the draft of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. I was pleased to see that this "challenge" of preparing sample homilies has returned. In the end, the homily is prepared by the parish priest in his own context, for he speaks to "his" parish. But he needs help in understanding and in making understood this "present" of the Word that is never a Word of the past but of the "present".

Lastly, the third section: *caritas, diakonia*. We are always responsible for the suffering, the sick, the marginalized, the poor. From the portrait of your Diocese, I see that many are in need of our *diakonia*, and this is also always a missionary opportunity. Thus, it seems to me that the "classic" parish pastoral ministry transcends itself in all three sectors and is becoming missionary pastoral

care.

I now move on to the second aspect of pastoral care, concerning both the agents and the work that is to be done. The parish priest cannot do it all! It is impossible! He cannot be a "soloist"; he cannot do everything but needs other pastoral workers. It seems to me that today, both in the Movements and in Catholic Action, in the new Communities that exist, we have agents who must be collaborators in the parish if we are to have "integrated" pastoral care.

I would like to say that for this "integrated" pastoral ministry it is important today that the other agents present are not only activated but are integrated in the work of the parish. The parish priest must not only "do", but also "delegate". The others must learn to be really integrated in their joint work for the parish and, of course, also in the self-transcendence of the parish in a double sense: self-transcendence in the sense that parishes collaborate within the Diocese because the Bishop is their common Pastor and helps coordinate their commitments; and self-transcendence in the sense that they work for all the people of this time and seek to reach out with the message to agnostics and to people who are searching. This is the third level, of which we have previously spoken at length.

It seems to me that the opportunities mentioned give us the chance to meet and to say a missionary word to those who do not come to the parish, have no faith or have little faith. It is especially these new subjects of pastoral care and lay people who exercise the professions of our time, who must also take God's Word to areas often inaccessible to the parish priest.

Coordinated by the Bishop, let us seek together to organize these different sectors of pastoral care, to activate the various agents and recipients of pastoral care in the common commitment: on the one hand, to encourage the faith of believers, which is a great treasure, and on the other, to reach out with the proclamation of the faith to all who are sincerely seeking a satisfying response to their existential questions.

Liturgy

Fr Vittorio Petrucci, parochial vicar in Aprilia:

Your Holiness, for the pastoral year that is about to begin, our Diocese was asked by the Bishop to pay special attention to the Liturgy, in the theological dimension and in celebrative practices. The central theme for reflection at the residential weeks in which we shall be taking part in September is: "The planning and implementation of the proclamation in the liturgical year, in sacraments and in sacramentals". As priests, we are called to celebrate a "serious, simple and beautiful liturgy", to use a beautiful formula contained in the document "Communicating the Gospel in a Changing World" by the Italian Bishops. Holy Father, can you help us to understand how all this can be expressed in the "ars celebrandi"?

Benedict XVI:

Ars celebrandi: here too I would say that there are different dimensions. The first dimension is that the *celebratio* is prayer and a conversation with God: God with us and us with God. Thus, the first requirement for a good celebration is that the priest truly enter this colloquy. In proclaiming the Word, he feels himself in conversation with God. He is a listener to the Word and a preacher of the Word, in the sense that he makes himself an instrument of the Lord and seeks to understand this Word of God which he must then transmit to the people. He is in a conversation with God because the texts of Holy Mass are not theatrical scripts or anything like them, but prayers, thanks to which, together with the assembly, I speak to God.

It is important, therefore, to enter into this conversation. St Benedict in his "Rule" tells the monks, speaking of the recitation of the Psalms, "*Mens concordet voci*". The *vox*, words, precede our mind. This is not usually the case: one has to think first, then one's thought becomes words. But here, the words come first. The sacred Liturgy gives us the words; we must enter into these words, find a harmony with this reality that precedes us.

In addition, we must also learn to understand the structure of the Liturgy and why it is laid out as it is. The Liturgy developed in the course of two millenniums and even after the Reformation was not something worked out by simply a few liturgists. It has always remained a continuation of this ongoing growth of worship and proclamation.

Thus, to be well in tune, it is very important to understand this structure that developed over time and to enter with our *mens* into the *vox* of the Church. To the extent that we have interiorized this structure, comprehended this structure, assimilated the words of the Liturgy, we can enter into this inner consonance and thus not only speak to God as individuals, but enter into the "we" of the Church, which is praying. And we thus transform our "I" in this way, by entering into the "we" of the Church, enriching and enlarging this "I", praying with the Church, with the words of the Church, truly being in conversation with God.

This is the first condition: we ourselves must interiorize the structure, the words of the Liturgy, the Word of God. Thus, our celebration truly becomes a celebration "with" the Church: our hearts are enlarged and we are not doing just anything but are "with" the Church, in conversation with God. It seems to me that people truly feel that we converse with God, with them, and that in this common prayer we attract others, in communion with the children of God we attract others; or if not, we are only doing something superficial.

Thus, the fundamental element of the true *ars celebrandi* is this consonance, this harmony between what we say with our lips and what we think with our heart. The "*Sursum corda*", which is a very ancient word of the Liturgy, should come before the Preface, before the Liturgy, as the "path" for our speaking and thinking. We must raise our heart to the Lord, not only as a ritual

response but as an expression of what is happening in this heart that is uplifted, and also lifts up others.

In other words, the *ars celebrandi* is not intended as an invitation to some sort of theatre or show, but to an interiority that makes itself felt and becomes acceptable and evident to the people taking part. Only if they see that this is not an exterior or spectacular *ars* - we are not actors! - but the expression of the journey of our heart that attracts their hearts too, will the Liturgy become beautiful, will it become the communion with the Lord of all who are present.

Of course, external things must also be associated with this fundamental condition, expressed in St Benedict's words: "*Mens concordet voci*" - the heart is truly raised, uplifted to the Lord. We must learn to say the words properly.

Sometimes, when I was still a teacher in my Country, young people had read the Sacred Scriptures. And they read them as one reads the text of a poem one has not understood. Naturally, to learn to say words correctly one must first understand the text with its drama, with its immediacy. It is the same for the Preface and for the Eucharistic Prayer.

It is difficult for the faithful to follow a text as long as our Eucharistic Prayer. For this reason these new "inventions" are constantly cropping up. However, with constantly new Eucharistic Prayers one does not solve the problem. The problem is that this is a moment that also invites others to silence with God and to pray with God. Therefore, things can only go better if the Eucharistic Prayer is said well and with the correct pauses for silence, if it is said with interiority but also with the art of speaking.

It follows that the recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer requires a moment of special attention if it is to be spoken in such a way that it involves others. I believe we should also find opportunities in catechesis, in homilies and in other circumstances to explain this Eucharistic Prayer well to the People of God so that they can follow the important moments - the account and the words of the Institution, the prayer for the living and the dead, the thanksgiving to the Lord and the *epiclesis* - if the community is truly to be involved in this prayer.

Thus, the words must be pronounced properly. There must then be an adequate preparation. Altar servers must know what to do; lectors must be truly experienced speakers. Then the choir, the singing, should be rehearsed: and let the altar be properly decorated. All this, even if it is a matter of many practical things, is part of the *ars celebrandi*.

But to conclude, the fundamental element is this art of entering into communion with the Lord, which we prepare for as priests throughout our lives.

The family

Fr Angelo Pennazza, parish priest in Pavona:

Your Holiness, in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" we read that "...Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed towards the salvation of others... They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God" (n. 1534). This seems to us truly fundamental, not only for our pastoral action but also for our way of being priests. What can we priests do to express this proposal in pastoral praxis and, according to what you yourself have just reaffirmed, to communicate positively the beauty of Marriage which can still make the men and women of our time fall in love? What can the sacramental grace of spouses contribute to our lives as priests?

Benedict XVI:

Two tremendous questions! The first one is: how is it possible to communicate the beauty of marriage to the people of today? We see how many young people are reluctant to marry in church because they are afraid of finality; indeed, they are even reluctant to have a civil wedding. Today, to many young people and even to some who are not so young, definitiveness appears as a constriction, a limitation of freedom. And what they want first of all is freedom. They are afraid that in the end they might not succeed. They see so many failed marriages. They fear that this juridical form, as they understand it, will be an external weight that will extinguish love.

It is essential to understand that it is not a question of a juridical bond, a burden imposed with marriage. On the contrary, depth and beauty lie precisely in finality. Only in this way can love mature to its full beauty. But how is it possible to communicate this? I think this problem is common to us all.

For me, in Valencia - and Your Eminence, you can confirm this - it was an important moment not only when I talked about this, but when various families presented themselves to me with one or more children; one family was virtually a "parish", it had so many children! The presence and witness of these families really was far stronger than any words.

They presented first of all the riches of their family experience: how such a large family truly becomes a cultural treasure, an opportunity for the education of one and all, a possibility for making the various cultural expressions of today coexist, the gift of self, mutual help also in suffering, etc.

But their testimony of the crises they had suffered was also significant. One of these couples had almost reached the point of divorcing. They explained that they then learned to live through this crisis, this suffering of the otherness of the other, and to accept each other anew. Precisely in overcoming the moment of crisis, the desire to separate, a new dimension of love developed and opened the door to a new dimension of life, which nothing but tolerating the suffering of the crisis could reopen.

This seems to me very important. Today, a crisis point is reached the moment the diversity of temperament is perceived, the difficulty of putting up with each other every day for an entire life. In the end, then, they decided: let us separate. From these testimonies we understood precisely that in crises, in bearing the moment in which it seems that no more can be borne, new doors and a new beauty of love truly open.

A beauty consisting of harmony alone is not true beauty. Something is missing, it becomes insufficient. True beauty also needs contrast. Darkness and light complement each other. Even a grape, in order to ripen, does not only need the sun but also the rain, not only the day but also the night.

We priests ourselves, both young and old, must learn the need for suffering and for crises. We must put up with and transcend this suffering. Only in this way is life enriched. I believe that the fact the Lord bears the stigmata for eternity has a symbolic value. As an expression of the atrocity of suffering and death, today the stigmata are seals of Christ's victory, of the full beauty of his victory and his love for us. We must accept, both as priests and as married persons, the need to put up with the crises of otherness, of the other, the crisis in which it seems that it is no longer possible to stay together.

Husbands and wives must learn to move ahead together, also for love of the children, and thus be newly acquainted with one another, love one another anew with a love far deeper and far truer. So it is that on a long journey, with its suffering, love truly matures.

It seems to me that we priests can also learn from married people precisely because of their suffering and sacrifices. We often think that celibacy on its own is a sacrifice. However, knowing the sacrifices married people make - let us think of their children, of the problems that arise, of the fears, suffering, illnesses, rebellion, and also of the problems of the early years when nights are almost always spent sleeplessly because of the crying of small children - we must learn our sacrifice from them, from their sacrifices. And at the same time we must learn that it is beautiful to mature through sacrifices and thus to work for the salvation of others.

Fr Pennazza, you correctly mentioned the Council which says that Marriage is a Sacrament for the salvation of others: first of all for the salvation of the other, of the husband and of the wife, but also of the children, the sons and daughters, and lastly of the entire community. And thus, priesthood too matures in the encounter.

I then think that we ought to involve families. Family celebrations seem to me to be very important. On the occasion of celebrations it is right that the family, the beauty of families, appear. Even testimonies - although they are perhaps somewhat too fashionable - can in some instances truly be a proclamation, a help for us all.

To conclude, I consider it very significant that in St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, God's marriage with humanity through the Incarnation of the Lord is achieved on the Cross, on which is born the new humanity: the Church.

Precisely from these divine nuptials Christian marriage is born. As St Paul says, it is the sacramental concretization of what happens in this great mystery. Thus, we must learn ever anew this bond between the Cross and the Resurrection, between the Cross and the beauty of the Redemption, and insert ourselves into this sacrament. Let us pray to the Lord to help us proclaim this mystery well, to live this mystery, to learn from married couples how they live it in order to help us live the Cross, so that we may also attain moments of joy and of the Resurrection.

Youth

Fr Gualtiero Isacchi, Director of Diocesan Service for the Pastoral Care of Youth:

Young people are the focus of a more decisive attention on the part of our dioceses and of the entire Church in Italy. The World Days have led them to this discovery: there are a great many young people and they are enthusiastic. Yet, our parishes in general are not adequately equipped to welcome them; parish communities and pastoral workers are not sufficiently trained to talk to them; the priests involved in the various tasks do not have the time required to listen to them. They are remembered when they become a problem or when we need them to enliven some celebration or festivity.... How can a priest today express a preferential option for young people in view of his busy pastoral agenda? How can we serve young people based on their own scale of values instead of involving them in "our own things"?

Benedict XVI:

I would like first of all to stress what you have said. On the occasion of the World Youth Days and at other events - as recently, on the Eve of Pentecost - it appears that young people are also in search of God. The young want to see if God exists and what God tells us. Consequently, there is a certain willingness, in spite of all the difficulties of our time. An enthusiasm also exists. Therefore, we must do all we can to try to keep alive this flame that shows itself on occasions such as the World Youth Days.

What shall we do? This is our common question. I think that precisely here, an "integrated pastoral care" should be put into practice, for in fact not every parish priest can cope adequately with youth. He therefore needs a pastoral apostolate that transcends the limits of the parish and that also transcends the limits of the priest's work; a pastoral apostolate that involves numerous pastoral workers.

It seems to me that under the Bishop's coordination, a way should be found, on the one hand, to

integrate young people into the parish so that they may be the leaven of parish life; and on the other, also to obtain for these youth the help of extra-parochial personnel. These two things must go hand-in-hand. It is necessary to suggest to young people that not only in the parish but also in various contexts they must integrate themselves into the life of the dioceses so as to meet subsequently in the parish; so it is necessary to encourage all initiatives along these lines.

I think that volunteer experience is very important nowadays. It is vital not to leave young people to the mercy of discos but to have useful tasks for them to do in which they see they are necessary, realize that they can do something good. By feeling this impulse to do something useful for humanity, for someone, for a group, young people also become aware of this incentive to strive to find the "track" of a positive commitment, of a Christian ethic.

It seems to me very important that young people truly find tasks that demonstrate that they are needed, that guide them on the way of a positive service of assistance inspired by Christ's love for men and women, so that they themselves seek the sources from which to draw strength and commitment.

Another experience is offered by the prayer groups where, in their own youthful context, the young learn to listen to the Word of God, to learn the Word of God and to enter into contact with God. This also means learning the common form of prayer, the Liturgy, which at first sight might perhaps seem rather inaccessible to them. They learn that the Word of God exists and seeks us out, despite all the distance of the times, and speaks to us today. We offer to the Lord the fruit of the earth and of the work of our hands and we find it transformed into a gift of God. We speak as children to the Father and we then receive the gift of the Lord himself. We receive the mission to go out into the world with the gift of his Presence.

It would also be useful to have liturgy schools that young people could attend. Moreover, opportunities for young people to present and introduce themselves are vital. I heard that here in Albano a play on the life of St Francis was performed. Committing oneself in this sense means desiring to penetrate the personality of St Francis, of his time, and thereby widening one's own personality. It is only an example, something apparently fairly unusual. It can be a lesson to broaden the personality, to enter into a context of Christian tradition, to reawaken the thirst for a better knowledge of the sources from which this saint drew. He was not only an environmentalist or a pacifist. He was above all a convert.

I read with great pleasure that Bishop Sorrentino of Assisi, precisely to obviate this "abuse" of the figure of St Francis, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of his conversion wished to establish a "Year of Conversion" to see what the true "challenge" is. Perhaps we can all animate youth a little to make the meaning of conversion understood by also finding a link with the figure of St Francis and seeking a route that broadens life. Francis was first a kind of "playboy". He then felt that this was not enough. He heard the Lord's voice: "Rebuild my House". Little by little, he came

to understand what "building the House of the Lord" means.

I do not, therefore, have very practical answers, because I find myself facing a mission where I already find young people gathered, thanks be to God. But it seems to me that one ought to make use of all the possibilities offered today by the Movements, Associations and Volunteer Groups and in other activities for youth. It is also necessary to present young people to the parish so that it sees who the young people are. Vocations' promotion is necessary. The whole thing must be coordinated by the Bishop. It seems to me that pastoral workers are found through the same authentic cooperation of young people who are training. And thus, it is possible to open the way to conversion, to the joy that God exists and is concerned about us, that we have access to God and can help others "rebuild his House".

It seems to me that this, finally, is our mission, sometimes difficult, but in the end very beautiful: to "build God's House" in the contemporary world.

Thank you for your attention and I ask you to forgive me for my disconnected answers. Let us collaborate so that "God's House" in our time will grow and many young people will find the path of service to the Lord.

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