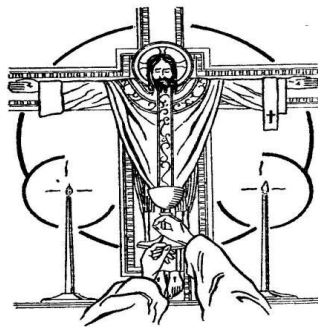


My Beloved Sons, the Priests **“... Uphold the Sanctity and Dignity of Your Calling”**



THE † ETERNAL † SACRIFICE

(Design from Holy Card in remembrance of Most. Rev. Bishop Paul F. Leibold's Silver Jubilee
of ordination to the priesthood-1940-1965)

The words of the above title were spoken by Our Lady to Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil on September 26-27, 1957. Earlier, in the 1940's while World War II was well under way, Sister had locutions with Our Lord and Our Lady regarding the renewal of the family, the need for a reform of life centered around the imitation of the simple virtues of the Holy Family and that awesome mystery of sanctification from within through union with the Divine Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity in our souls. One year before this exhortation to priests, September 25, 1956, Our Lady had appeared to Sister Mildred under the new image of Our Lady of America®, calling on America to lead the world in a **“spiritual renewal never before so necessary, so important, so vital.”** This unprecedented favor from heaven to America carried the promise of great miracles, **“not of the body but of the soul,”** and the responsibility, the mandate to America in particular, to be the leader of the world in this spiritual renewal and return to Faith and Purity and the interior life. Only then would the peace of Christ reign in our hearts and in our world and only then would the long promised triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart be realized.

Christ's work of redemption, in which both Mary and Joseph shared deeply as co-redeemers, will continue until the end of time through Christ's Mystical Body, His Church, and especially through His priests who are authoritatively appointed to the ministry of Divine Worship, chief of which is the offering of sacrifice to give homage to God in the name of the community and for the atonement of sin. The priest presides at services of worship as a bridge or intermediary between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity, between God's justice and His mercy. His function is to dispense the grace Christ has won for us and has stored in the treasury of the Church for the salvation of all. The priest plays a central role in salvation history and is called to lead in

the crusade of expiation and penance against the blasphemy, sin and wickedness that overtake the world in new ways with each generation and which dishonor grievously the sacred trust and nobility God enshrined in our human nature as He created it. There are two degrees of priesthood, the first and complete or total is that of the bishops who have the chief control of divine worship and administration of the sacraments; the second or incomplete and participatory is that of the priests who receive authority from the bishop and can function in all things but those reserved for the bishop. We wish to focus on the sublime vocation and salvific mission of the Catholic priesthood as it applies to all priests in making the Perfect Sacrifice and Immolation of the Lamb of God and His Eternal Priesthood constantly present to us in our confessionals for the forgiveness of sin, and on our altars for the nourishment of our souls. The priest accompanies us all along the way, from birth to death, on our pilgrimage of faith to the Fatherland.

A number of remarkable encyclicals and letters have been written by or under the auspices of various popes with respect to the priesthood: ***Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*** on the sublimity of the Catholic priesthood by Pope Pius XI; ***Sacramentum Ordinis*** on the rites of the sacrament by Pope Pius XII; ***Menti Nostrae*** by Pope Pius XII and ***Haerent Animo*** by Pope Pius X on the holiness of the priest; ***Sacerdotalis Ceelibatus*** by Pope Paul VI on clerical celibacy; ***Inter Insignioris***, and ***Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*** by Pope John Paul II on the question of women priests; and ***Mit Brennender Sorge, On the Church in the German Reich*** by Pope Pius XI at the time of Hitler's rise to power as the Church sought to protect its priests and its influence in Germany, and ***Sacerdotii Nostris Primordia*** by Pope John XXIII on St. John Vianney as a model for priests. If the Cure of Ars is to be a model for all priests, then we must know why.

Pope John XXIII wrote ***The Encyclical Letter on St. John Vianney*** on August 1, 1959 to honor the 100th anniversary of the death of the humble French priest, Jean Marie Baptiste Vianney, and to proclaim him a model for all the clergy. John Vianney was born May 8, 1786 and died August 4, 1859 at age 73. He was beatified by Pope Pius X in 1905 and made patron saint of parish priests in France. He was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and made the patron saint of parish priests throughout the world. Pope John XXIII cites the example of the priesthood of St. John Vianney to elaborate on the role of the priest as an “**alter-Christus**” who “**leaves all to gain all**” and totally identifies his life with Christ's life and holiness and ministry in complete obedience to the will of the Father expressed in the authority of the Church, solely for the glory of God.

Through the character of Sacred Orders, God willed to ratify that eternal covenant of love, by which He loves His priests above all others; and they are obliged to repay God for this special love with holiness of life... So a cleric should be considered as a man chosen and set apart from the midst of the people, and blessed in a very special way with heavenly gifts—a sharer in divine power, and, to put it briefly, another Christ... He is no longer supposed to live for himself; nor can he devote himself to the interests of just his own relatives, or

friends or native land... He must be aflame with charity toward everyone. Not even his thoughts, his will, his feelings belong to him, for they are rather those of Jesus Christ who is his life." (Pope John XXIII, *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*)

Sociologists tell us every culture from the beginning of mankind has had some form of the priesthood and of sacrifice to acknowledge their creaturehood subject to a Supreme Being, the Creator. We know about pagan cultures and the human sacrifices to their false gods. Sacred Scripture describes the priesthood of the Hebrew Covenant passed on in the tribe of Levi as mandated by Moses and of the priest and king of Salem, Melchizedek, who used bread and wine in his sacrificial offering, not animals. Melchizedek prefigures, in a most unique way, the person and priestly sacrifice of Jesus Who consecrates bread and wine, through that awesome mystery of transubstantiation, into His own Body and Blood on every altar, to be offered to God in praise and thanksgiving and expiation for sin, and to be offered to us as the Bread of Eternal Life, making us one with Himself and with our Triune God and with one another in the Body of Christ in this holy communion.

Can we not see that same exhortation to holiness of life and recognition of the sublime and exalted vocation and dignity of the priesthood in its identity with the Eternal Priesthood of Christ in the words of Our Lady of America® to Sister Mildred Neuzil?

"My dear daughter, sweet child, write my words carefully, because they are of the utmost importance. I address them to my beloved sons, the priests, dedicated to the most intense and extraordinary imitation of my Son in the perfect carrying on of His Eternal Priesthood.

Beloved sons, so cherished and greatly blessed among the sons of men, be careful to uphold the sanctity and dignity of your calling. Let the faithful see in you the favored and especially loved imitators of the Son of God. Be modest in your dress and speech as becomes those of so exalted a vocation. The apparel and manners of a man of the world is not for you, who, though living in the world, must not take on its ways.

It is through you that the grace of the Sacraments is given to souls. Strive then to make yourselves more worthy receptacles to receive these graces and transmit them in turn to the souls under your care.

Dear sons, I ask you to practice self-denial and penance in a special manner, because it is you who must lead my children in the way of peace. Yet this peace will come only by way of the sword, the flaming sword of love. If, therefore, you love my Son and wish to honor me, heed my admonition and be the first to give the example of a life of penance and self-denial. Thus, by sanctification from within you, you will become a bright and burning light to the faithful, who look to you for help and guidance.

I am pleased, dearly beloved sons, by the honor and love you have until now accorded me. Will you now go further and honor me yet more by taking my words to your hearts and doing what I ask?"

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pg. 20.)

Our Lady calls our priests her beloved sons because they are "other Christs," and as the Mother of the physical Christ, she is also Mother of the Mystical Christ, His Church, founded on Peter, the rock, and the other apostles, the first priests and bishops of Christ's Church duly ordained by Christ Himself. The Church was born out of the side of Christ on the hill of Calvary and was presented to Mary, Christ's Mother, in the person of John, one of the 12, as her other son whom Jesus dearly loved. Our Lady calls priests her beloved sons precisely because they are so cherished and blessed among the sons of men, sealed with an indelible mark at their ordination that makes them a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. Nothing can blot that character from their souls, not even sin nor departure from the priesthood; it lasts forever even when the ecclesial right to function does not. What horror it would be should a priest go to hell, forever marked as the beloved son of God and of Mary, and having denounced so great a favor! Our Lady asks her beloved sons to lead the faithful to holiness by example as well as by word and sacrament, renouncing the ways of the world and leading lives of penance and self-denial that purify the heart so the soul may be sanctified from within. Yes, sadly, there have been some priests who have fallen prey to human weakness and have scandalized the faithful and the unbeliever, but far more are those faithful sons who live up to their high calling in humility and obedience, building up the Body of Christ by living the radical consecration of their whole being to the things of God. Priests have been given authority over the Body of Christ and to forgive sins, powers not even the angels and archangels have.

In his encyclical on St. John Vianney, Pope John XXIII presents him as a model for all priests in his self-denial, his piety, his great devotion to the Eucharist and to Our Lady, his pastoral zeal for the salvation of souls and his mercy to the penitent. St. John Vianney was a priest in the aftermath of the anti-clerical, anti-ecclesial French Revolution during which many priests were persecuted and martyred if they refused to become "juror priests," surrendering their allegiance to God for that of the French constitution. While few may be called to such a high degree of perfection, all are called to strive for it. St. John Vianney was hard on himself but gentle with others. He understood greater interior holiness was demanded of him by the nature of ordination that compels the priest to the imitation of Christ. He wished to give everything away and to keep nothing for himself. He believed there is but one way to devote oneself to God, and that is to devote oneself completely. It was normal for him to spend fifteen hours a day in the confessional. He once said that if we had the faith to see a soul in mortal sin, we would die of fright. He gave his penitents a small penance and placed the larger

share of expiation for their sins upon himself. He saw himself as a minister of divine mercy and believed God is quicker to forgive than a mother is to snatch her child from the fire. Humility and obedience were the earmarks of his life. Pope John XXIII addressed this role of obedience of priests in these words:

We are offering clerics this total obedience as a model, with full confidence that its force and beauty will lead them to strive for it more ardently. And if there should be someone who dares to cast doubt on the supreme importance of this virtue—as sometimes happens at the present time—let him take to heart these words of our predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, which everyone should keep firmly in mind: “The holiness of any life and the effectiveness of any apostolate has constant and faithful obedience to the hierarchy as its solid foundation, basis and support.”(Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter on St. John Vianney. He then quotes Pope Paul VI’s *Menti Nostrae*)

Just as the whole life of Our Savior was pointed toward His sacrifice of Himself, so too the life of the priest, who must reproduce the image of Christ in himself, must become a pleasing sacrifice with Him and through Him and in Him. . . And so it is not enough for him to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice, but in a very deep sense, he must live it; for in this way, he can draw from it the heavenly strength that will enable him to be profoundly transformed and to share in the expiatory life of the Divine Redeemer himself. The soul of the priest must refer what takes place on the sacrificial altar to himself; for just as Jesus Christ immolates Himself, his minister must immolate himself along with Him; just as Jesus expiates the sins of men, so too the priest must tread the lofty path of Christian asceticism to bring about his own purification and that of his neighbors.

So urgent today is the need for priests and the need to pray for their protection from the attacks of the powers and principalities that on June 19, 2009, feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus into whose Heart all priests are placed at ordination, and the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests, Pope Benedict XVI issued his encyclical letter opening ***The Year of the Priest***, renewing the call to priestly holiness and inviting the whole Church to pray for its priests. He outlined the fundamental duty of the priest:

Understand what you do, imitate the things you deal with; and celebrating the mystery of the death of the Lord, strive to mortify in your members all vice and concupiscence. May your doctrine be the spiritual medicine for the people of God; let the fragrance of your life of virtue be an ornament of the Church of Christ; and by your preaching and example may you build the house, that is the family of God. Your life, which should be completely immune from sin, should be even more hidden with Christ in God than the lives of Christian layfolk. Advance then, thus adorned with that high virtue which your dignity demands, to the work of completing the redemption of man for which your priestly ordination has destined you.

Other holy priests have excelled in lives of expiation for sin and zeal for the salvation of souls in union with the redemptive work of Christ. Who is not familiar with Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, one of the greatest saints of all times, canonized by Pope John Paul II on June 16, 2002? He could read souls, levitate, bore the stigmata, was seen in apparitions, understood languages other than his own, had the “odor of sanctity” and could work miracles. Those who could not request them in person were told to send him their guardian angels bearing their needs for intercession and healing. He died September 23, 1968. Never since St. Francis of Assisi has there been a miracle-worker like Padre Pio who also bore the stigmata!

In the message of Our Lady of America® we learn of another priest who lived a humble and holy life in a far simpler way than the Cure of Ars or St. Francis or Padre Pio, a way easier to identify with as ordinary pastors and Christians. Father Paul Leibold, later Bishop and then Archbishop, was the priest chosen by Our Lady herself to guide Sister Mildred in this important work for the salvation of souls, this urgent message for America and for all to the world. Archbishop Leibold was Sister Mildred’s spiritual director and the greatest promoter of Our Lady’s cause during those early years when evil forces were at work to impede or even destroy it. He was appealing in his simplicity, always kind and easy to work with as his secretary states, preferring his humble tasks in the parish to the erudition and scholarship of the Second Vatican Council prelates, choosing a simple house to a more elegant chancery, and always preaching the holiness of fulfilling the ordinary duties of one’s life versus extraordinary works that are often self-willed and open to pride. He guided Sister Mildred for 32 years from 1940 to his death in 1972. For those who knew or worked with him, it would be no surprise if he were raised to the altar of sanctity one day, precisely because of his humble and obedient faith and his role in the cause of Our Lady of America® with its message of the Divine Indwelling Trinity in every soul, the means God has ordained to crush the head of the ancient serpent and bring final victory to the Church. It was he who helped Sister fulfill Our Lady’s request to have a medal struck that would bear her image on the front and the coat of arms of the Christian family on the back. Of this task Our Lady states:

“My child, God works often through little and humble things and such instruments should never be despised but accepted and used with love and gratitude. It will be through the medal that God’s Will will be manifested and glorified and my desires carried out to the very end. I place my confidence in my faithful sons, the Bishops, who will not fail to take up my cause and make it bear much fruit for sanctification among so many and countless souls. Send this word then to my beloved son, the Archbishop, and have no fear sweet child for I will keep my promise for I am the ever faithful Virgin.”

[The then archbishop passed away and Bishop Leibold who succeeded him carried out Our Lady’s request.] (Diary, Pgs.35-36.)

In 1980 Our Lady spoke of her faithful children, priests and religious, and what a consolation they are to her. She begs us to make people understand that the life of God within us is the source of our peace and happiness. These are her words:

“Dear child, there are those of my children who are faithful, among these are my priests and religious who live a life of prayer and dedication to the work of my Son. What a consolation they are to me, with what joy I watch them furthering the Kingdom. But there must be more of such self-sacrificing souls, many, many more. Until this comes to pass, peace will not come, rather much more of suffering will encompass the world. I wish to spare my children from this, but I cannot do it without their help. You must try to make my people understand that the life of God within them is the source of their peace and happiness. There is no other way. This is what my Son came to teach and bring and it was for this He lived and died. Unless this mystery of God’s Presence within is accepted and lived, peace will not come. It is the only way, believe me, my daughter.” (Diary, Pg. 37.)

Heeding Our Lady’s words, let us pray especially for our priests and never let the “Year of the Priest” end. They are our spiritual leaders and we look to them to be bold with the Spirit of God, wearing the armor of Christ and bearing the sharp sword of Divine Truth against the enemies of God and Christ’s Church. Pray that God will send us more holy priests like those we celebrate in this article, priests formed in the refining fires of the flaming furnace of Divine Love that is the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A good shepherd, a pastor after God’s heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish, and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy. He [St. John Vianney] spoke of the priesthood as if incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the gift and task entrusted to a human creature: “O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...”. Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: “Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest... After God, the priest is everything! ... Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is.” (Pope Benedict XVI, letter proclaiming The Year of the Priest and referring to St. John Vianney.)

Love and pray for our priests!

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