

TO OUR BELOVED SON, GERALD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, S.P., SERVANT GENERAL

Our pastoral heart was greatly consoled, beloved son, when we learned of your very commendable apostolate among the Lord's own anointed, who, while bearing the "heat of the day and burden" (Matt. XX, 12), have fallen a prey to the insidious snares of evil that beset the path of priests. Your work on their behalf is like that of the Good Samaritan, for you tend their wounds, nursing them lovingly back to spiritual health and clothing them again in the radiant vesture of sacerdotal fervor and grace.

Indeed, the words of the beloved apostle to Gaius echo in a particular manner our sentiments towards your Congregation - "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, thou dost in accordance with faith whatever thou workest for the brethren, and that even when they are strangers. They have borne witness to thy love before the church. Thou wilt do well to see them off on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For on behalf of the Name they have gone forth, taking nothing from the pagans. We, therefore, ought to support such as these, that we may be fellow-workers for the truth."

But these men are not "strangers" in the strict sense of the Latin term "peregrini", rather they are brother-pilgrims on the road of life, sharing with all of us in the priesthood the privileged intimacy of a Divine vocation and the merit of a generous early response to that vocation in the dedication of their young lives to the higher path of self-denial in imitation of the Immaculate Lamb of God. They gave then and did not count the cost. If now they have been wounded in the fray, it is our duty to help them, for they are our brothers, our sick brothers.

But thanks to the Omnipotent Mercy of God, "this sickness is not unto death." The Lord, once the cherished ideal of their lives, their loving companion in prayer, in preaching, in pastoral work for souls, is still their Good Shepherd who will "go after that which is lost until he find it" (Luke, XV, 4). If indeed, He will do so for even one of the hundred sheep, how much more will He seek out the shepherd himself should he stray in the mountain mist! Did He not do so for His first shepherd, Peter, who was moved to tears by his Master's loving, unaccusing gaze? Had He not the same forgiving gaze for His other apostle, Judas, as He addressed him by the sweet and intimate term of "friend"? But, alas, the traitor's heart was too hard for tears. And as with the lost sheep, so with the strayed shepherd, the Good Shepherd will ease the fatigue of a long and sore-footed journey back to the fold, by "laying him on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke XV, 5).

And this He accomplishes, beloved son, through the faithful apostolate of such priests as members of the Congregation of the Servants of the Paraclete, specially devoted as instruments of Divine Mercy to the care of these souls. Through your charity and zeal the shattered fragments of clay are pieced together again, and lovingly fashioned into their pristine beauty as "vessels of election to carry Christ's name before the Gentiles" (Acts, IX, 15). Through your apostolate, the despairing receive hope again, the weak receive strength anew, all receive spiritual health and vigor in living and life-giving identification with Christ the Eternal Priest.

We read with particular pleasure, beloved son, that the central devotion in all the houses of your Congregation is to Our Eucharistic Lord. So, indeed, it should be. For the priest who has not the Blessed Sacrament in the center of his life cannot live his priesthood.

We exhort you, likewise, to stress in our name the absolute necessity of fidelity to prayer in the sacerdotal life, for therein alone lies the unfailing means of ensuring the protection of the Power of God against all the powers of darkness.

From our heart we beseech Almighty God to bestow His choicest graces upon your meritorious apostolate, beloved son, and in pledge thereof we lovingly impart to you, to all the members of your Congregation and to all the priests under your care, our special Apostolic Benediction.

From the Vatican, September 14, 1959.

(Signed) JOHN XXIII