

# Christ Calls His Priests to Healing

by Fr. Cuthbert Alexander

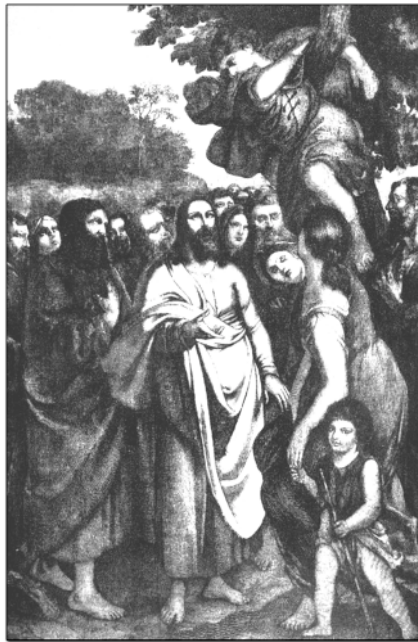
The Church is facing a crisis. It is true. I find it extraordinary, therefore, that I could agree with those who say: “this is a great time for Church.” And yes, I could add for good measure, I do believe it is an exciting time to be priest. These feelings I am convinced do not arise from a determination to see the rosy side of things or because my view of Church is just plainly triumphal.

Now, I have had other feelings too. At a meeting of priests a few weeks ago, one priest put it bluntly: “Every priest is suspect.” We priests have all sensed what his Holy Father described at Holy Thursday as “the dark shadow of suspicion”. And yet, this is a time of promise.

Some have said given all the media publicity at present, “recovery” will not come under three years. Others think it will take a much longer time. It would be a mistake for us priests to have a call-me-when-it’s-all-over approach, to say to ourselves “let’s just sit this one out.” The way I see it, this is an opportunity for a renewed vision; to look again at the priesthood; to listen and look more deeply; to hear the call of Jesus to be shepherds after his own heart.

In the Holy Thursday letter, John Paul uses the figure of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:1-10) as a ‘biblical icon’ to stress the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the priest’s role as minister. It seems a useful icon to keep before us in the present sadness.

What was it that impelled this senior tax-collector to climb the sycamore tree to see Jesus? In what follows we meet a man who yearns for holiness, perhaps



without being fully aware of the fact. But this is no chance meeting.

With Jesus’ call to Zacchaeus, his Holy Father says, “mercy has

preceded him.” In spite of the jeers and bad talk of the crowd, Zacchaeus stands his ground. He recognizes his sin, seeks to make reparation and receives mercy ‘as a gratuitous and overflowing gift.’

I believe the question for us today, given our present crisis, is “how is God impelling us his priests, his Church, along the road to mercy?” To be sure, his aim is that we come to a place of wholeness and healing.

As Church and as priests in particular, we could feel covered by the gravity of the sin that weighs upon us, but in this awkward time we must hear the voice of Jesus calling us, each one, by name. With urgency and a kind of insistence Jesus says: “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” Jesus wants to come into each heart, sinful as it is, to renew and to reform it. In response, I must open the door. I must welcome in Christ, the one who calls to repentance and reconciles.

In the Holy Thursday letter John Paul says: “all of us—conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace—are called to embrace the *mysterium Crucis* and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness. We must beg God in his providence to prompt a whole-hearted reawakening of those ideals of total self-giving to Christ which

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Submissions and articles are always appreciated from members. If you have events that are upcoming, please alert the editors so they can prepare a followup article on the event.

I am sitting here on the shores of beautiful Lake Champlain in South Hero, Vermont. The vista is magnificent: the water, the trees, the mountains, the breezes, the water fowl, etc. I can't help but reflect anew on the incredible imagination of our awesome Creator—how He must love us: all this is free of charge (a Great Blue Heron just flew by!).

With the aid of a book, "Conversations with God", by Francis Fernandez, I've been reflecting on the patriarch Abraham, our father in faith, who "hoping against hope" (Rm. 4.18), believed in God's promise that he would be the father of descendents as numerous as the sands on the seashore and stars in the sky. He died without receiving what was promised, but, as Heb. 11.13 tells us, he "saw it and hailed it from afar." He was a true friend of God, a just man, and because of his relationship with Yahweh others knew God's favor.

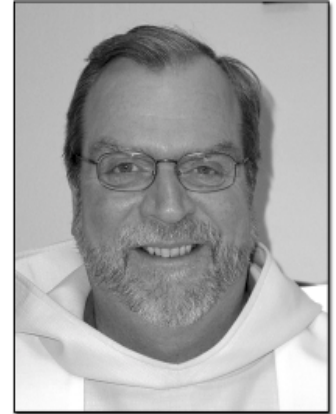
Remember the story when God proposed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18.16-33), because of the extreme sinfulness of those towns? Because Abraham was God's friend, God told him about his plans. Abraham's friendship with God was such that he could approach God asking for a re-consideration.

In a funny scene we see Abraham asking God if He would destroy the righteous along with the wicked. If there were fifty righteous people, would He destroy them? God answers that if Abraham finds fifty righteous people He would not destroy the towns. But Abraham could not find fifty, so He lowers the number to forty-five, and then to thirty, and then twenty. Finally it was clear that there were not even ten just people in these cities.

Imagine: two cities and ten righteous people could not be found! (Kind of gives new meaning to the title "Sin City"! ) But here is the thought for reflection: God would have forgiven everybody in the whole place out of love for ten just people!

Such is the value in God's eyes for saintly souls. He is prepared to go to any lengths for them.

Scripture often speaks of solidarity in evil, in the sense that the sins of some can cause harm to the whole community. But Abraham turns the terms of the day around: he asks God who esteems the justice of the saints so highly, that it be the saints who cause blessings to come down upon everyone, even though many are sinners. And God accepts the Patriarch's approach.



Spend some time meditating on God's joy and delight when He sees us struggling to be faithful to Him. Think of the value our actions may have when we do them for God. This is true even in the most unnoticed and inconspicuous actions. God delights in all struggles and efforts made for holiness. God delights in His saints; it is for their sake that He pours out His mercy and His forgiveness on others who may have done nothing themselves to merit it. It is a wonderful but at the same time a real mystery, that God so delights in those who journey towards sanctity.

If you find yourself wondering if God hears your prayers when they do not seem to be answered, or when things seem to be getting worse, KEEP PRAYING!!! Don't stop!

Perhaps one of the reasons America hasn't been severely punished for our sinfulness is because so many saints in our country still pray, and still pray for our country. Since the aftermath of Sept. 11 when the phrase "God bless America!" gets thrown around like confetti, I've been

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praying, "America, bless God!" Continue to pray for civil leaders, for teachers and people of influence. Continue to pray for priests and our Church. Never, never, underestimate the power and effect of your storming heaven; it is actually saving lives!

We of the Fraternity of Priests are grateful for the incredible blessings of the priesthood, the Church, and you, our loyal intercessors and benefactors. It is your efforts that keep us going, spurred on by the Spirit of God. Be assured of our prayers of thanksgiving for you and for your intentions.

Please remember to pray for your parish priest. In these days of unrest and sadness in the Church he needs your prayer and encouragement. Send his name into us so that we can pray for him too. On behalf of fraternities around the world, your brothers in the Lord, I say thank you and God bless you.

In Jesus,



Fr. John

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are the very foundation of the priestly ministry."

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## The way I see it, this is an opportunity for a renewed vision...

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It is this total self-giving which I believe the present circumstances could prompt. The road to holiness and healing passes by way of repentance and reconciliation. This holiness and healing is meant, of course, not only for us as priests but for the whole Church. Priests, in a particular way, called to repentance and reconciliation themselves, have been given the task of being ministers of reconciliation.

Now is an opportune time for repentance by the whole church. Through our liturgies, our preaching, our ministry, priests, acting *in persona Christi*, are called to lead others to transformation.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, John Paul states: "one can ... sum up the Church's mission, rich and complex as it is, as being her central task of reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbor, with the whole of creation".

This is a time of hope because it pushes towards repentance and reconciliation and because of what all this means for the mission of the Church.

## REPENTANCE: Way to Kingdom Living

Repentance is the initial, essential and introductory attitude or stance in the kingdom of God. Repentance is the way into the kingdom of God; a continuous lifestyle of repentance is the only way to stay in that kingdom (Mt 3:2; Mt 4:17; Mk 1:5).

We can reach the kingdom of God only through repentance, that is, only with an intimate and radical change of the whole person, the effect of which is that one begins to think, to judge and to reorganize one's life, moved by the holiness and goodness of God.

—Pope Paul VI

The message of repentance forms the very heart of the Church's mission... (and calls us to) commit ourselves to the life-long process which repentance and conversion entails.

—Pope John Paul II

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Please send us your prayer intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

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# THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.*

*Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.*

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