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## Letter of Holy Father to Priests Holy Thursday, 2005

1. In this Year of the Eucharist, I particularly welcome our annual spiritual encounter for Holy Thursday, the day when Christ's love was manifested "to the end" (cf. Jn 13:1), the day of the Eucharist, the day of our priesthood.

My thoughts turn to you, dear priests, as I spend this time recuperating in hospital, a patient alongside other patients, uniting in the Eucharist my own sufferings with those of Christ. In this spirit I want to reflect with you on some aspects of our priestly spirituality.

I will take as my inspiration the words of Eucharistic consecration, which we say every day in persona Christi in order to make present on our altars the sacrifice made once and for all on Calvary. These words provide us with illuminating insights for priestly spirituality: if the whole Church draws life from the Eucharist, all the more then must the life of a priest be "shaped" by the Eucharist. So for us, the words of institution must be more than a formula of consecration: they must be a "formula of life".

A life of profound "gratitude"

2. "Tibi gratias agens benedixit". At every Mass we remember and relive the first sentiment expressed by Jesus as he broke the bread: that of thanksgiving. Gratitude is the disposition which lies at the root of

the very word "Eucharist". This expression of thanksgiving contains the whole Biblical spirituality of praise for the *mirabilia Dei*. God loves us, he goes before us in his Providence, he accompanies us with his continuous saving acts.

In the Eucharist Jesus thanks the Father with us and for us. How could this thanksgiving of Jesus fail to shape the life of a priest? He knows that he must cultivate a constant sense of gratitude for the many gifts he has received in the course of his life: in particular, for the gift of faith, which it is his task to proclaim, and for the gift of the priesthood, which consecrates him totally to the service of the Kingdom of God. We have our crosses to bear — and we are certainly not the only ones! — but the gifts we have received are so great that we cannot fail to sing from the depths of our hearts our own Magnificat.

A life that is "given"

3. "Accipite et manducate. Accipite et bibite". Christ's self-giving, which has its origin in the Trinitarian life of the God who is Love, reaches its culmination in the sacrifice of the Cross, sacramentally anticipated in the Last Supper. It is impossible to repeat the words of consecration without feeling oneself caught up in this spiritual movement. In a certain sense, when he says the words: "take and eat", the priest must learn to apply them

also to himself, and to speak them with truth and generosity. If he is able to offer himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need, his life takes on its true meaning.

This is exactly what Jesus expected of his apostles, as the Evangelist John emphasizes in his account of the washing of the feet. It is also what the People of God expect of a priest. If we think about it more fully, the priest's promise of obedience, which he made on the day of Ordination and is asked to renew at the Chrism Mass, is illuminated by this relationship with the Eucharist. Obeying out of love, sacrificing even a certain legitimate freedom when the authoritative discernment of the Bishop so requires, the priest lives out in his own flesh that "take and eat" with which Christ, in the Last Supper, gave himself to the Church.

A life that is "saved" in order to save

4. "Hoc est enim corpus meum quod pro vobis tradetur." The body and the blood of Christ are given for the salvation of man, of the whole man and of all men. This salvation is integral and at the same time universal, because no one, unless he freely chooses, is excluded from the saving power of Christ's blood: "qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur". It is a sacrifice offered for "many", as the Biblical text says (Mk 14:24;

*...continued on page 3*

# Dear Friends of the Priesthood

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Please send all articles, comments and photos to the editor, Fr. Bill Cosgrove via e-mail at [frbill@optonline.com](mailto:frbill@optonline.com) or fax to 845-227-3951.

Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted!

One of the disadvantages of writing this letter to all of our friends in this newsletter is I need to write it about a month before you receive it. By the time you read this we will be in the midst of the Easter season celebrating the new life that Jesus gave us. Yet I am writing during the middle of Lent on a dreary day when we in the Northeast United States are expecting yet another snow storm. Frankly, it's not a day that really screams out: "Jesus is Risen! Alleluia!"

Yet, that is the challenge that we always face. In the midst of everything that goes on in our life and our world we are called to live out the Easter message of hope and peace. Whatever is going on we are called to be the Lord's disciples. We are called to proclaim with our lives as well as our words that the Lord is alive and has the power to change our lives and our world.

One of the great blessings of the Easter season is that it serves as a reminder to us each year that the new life we have received needs to be lived out. Just as Lent is a reminder of our need to depend upon the Lord's love and mercy, Easter is a reminder that we have a new way of life to live. Blessed be God that He allows us to follow Him and treats us with utmost patience and love.

We had a large number of children baptized at our Easter Vigil last year in my parish. An 8 year old boy who had just arrived in the US from South America was baptized and at the Sign of Peace turned to an elderly couple behind him and said "Hey Mister, are you baptized?" The man said "Yes, I was baptized many years ago when I was a baby." The young boy answered "I was just baptized, isn't it great?"

May we learn from the enthusiasm of the young and the young at heart among us. In my parish during the Easter Season at every liturgy we have the sprinkling rite. It is meant to remind us that our baptism is being renewed during

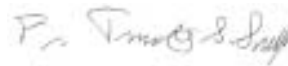
this season and we need to live it out.

The snow is starting to fall but it doesn't seem quite as dark any more. May the Easter message always ring true within our hearts.

As you read this we have a team giving a Fraternity Conference in Ukraine and priests preparing to travel again to India, Uganda and Tanzania to share the good news of the Fraternity of Priests.

Your generosity allows our ministry to continue. Happy Easter!

In Christ,



Fr. Timothy Graff



## Fraternity Financial Report

One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We're providing this information to help communicate our specific need and to thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

Monthly Donation Budget:	<b>\$6,300.00</b>
Actual Donations:	<b>\$7,748.00</b>
Budget Surplus (shortage)	<b>\$1,448.00</b>

*Current as of February 28, 2005.*

*...continued from page 1*  
Mt 26:28; cf. Is 53:11-12); this typical Semitic expression refers to the multitude who are saved by Christ, the one Redeemer, yet at the same time it implies the totality of human beings to whom salvation is offered: the Lord's blood is "shed for you and for all", as some translations legitimately make explicit. Christ's flesh is truly given "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51; cf. 1 Jn 2:2).

Repeating Christ's venerable words in the recollected silence of the liturgical assembly, we priests become privileged heralds of this mystery of salvation. Yet unless we sense that we ourselves are saved, how can we be convincing heralds? We are the first to be touched inwardly by the grace which raises us from our frailty and makes us cry "Abba, Father" with the confidence of God's children (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). This in turn commits us to advance along the path of perfection. Holiness, in fact, is the full expression of salvation. Only if our lives manifest the fact that we are saved do we become credible heralds of salvation. Moreover, a constant awareness of Christ's will to offer salvation to all cannot fail to inspire us with fresh missionary fervour, spurring each of us on to become "all things to all men, in order to save at least some of them" (1 Cor 9:22).

A life that "remembers"

5. "Hoc facite in meam commemorationem." These words of Jesus have been preserved for us not only by Luke (22:19) but also by Paul (1 Cor 11:24). We should keep in mind that they were spoken in the context of the Paschal meal, which for the Jews was

indeed a "memorial" (in Hebrew, zikkarôn). On that occasion the Israelites relived the Exodus first and foremost, but also the other important events of their history: the call of Abraham, the sacrifice of Isaac, the Covenant of Sinai, the many acts of God in defence of his people. For Christians too, the Eucharist is a "memorial", but of a unique kind: it not only commemorates, but sacramentally makes present the death and resurrection of the Lord.

Jesus said: "Do this in memory of me". The Eucharist does not simply commemorate a fact; it commemorates Him! Through his daily repetition in persona Christi of the words of the "memorial", the priest is invited to develop a "spirituality of remembrance". At a time when rapid social and cultural changes are weakening the sense of tradition and leading the younger generation especially to risk losing touch with their roots, the priest is called to be, within the community entrusted to him, the man who faithfully remembers the entire mystery of Christ: prefigured in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the New, and understood ever more deeply, under the guidance of the Spirit, as Jesus explicitly promised: "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

A "consecrated" life

6. "Mysterium fidei!" Every time he proclaims these words after consecrating the bread and wine, the priest expresses his ever-renewed amazement at the extraordinary miracle worked at his hands. It is a miracle which only the eyes of faith can perceive. The natural elements do not lose their external

characteristics, since the "species" remain those of bread and wine; but their "substance", through the power of Christ's word and the action of the Holy Spirit, is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. On the altar, then, Christ crucified and risen is "truly, really and substantially" present in the fullness of his humanity and divinity. What an eminently sacred reality! That is why the Church treats this mystery with such great reverence, and takes such care to ensure the observance of the liturgical norms intended to safeguard the sanctity of so great a sacrament.

We priests are the celebrants, but also the guardians of this most sacred mystery. It is our relationship to the Eucharist that most clearly challenges us to lead a "sacred" life. This must shine forth from our whole way of being, but above all from the way we celebrate. Let us sit at the school of the saints! The Year of the Eucharist invites us to rediscover those saints who were vigorous proponents of Eucharistic devotion (cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 31). Many beatified and canonized priests have given exemplary testimony in this regard, enkindling fervour among the faithful present at their celebrations of Mass. Many of them were known for their prolonged Eucharistic adoration. To place ourselves before Jesus in the Eucharist, to take advantage of our "moments of solitude" and to fill them with this Presence, is to enliven our consecration by our personal relationship with Christ, from whom our life derives its joy and its meaning.

Edited for publication. The complete letter can be found online through the Vatican's website at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

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

# THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

## A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

*O 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.*

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

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May 2005						
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### A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

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