



MISSIONARIES OF ST. CHARLES
SCALABRINIANS
SAINT CHARLES BORROMEO PROVINCE

Symposium on Spirituality

Papers on Scalabrinian Spirituality

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April 2023



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Gift of Prayer in the Spirit (120)

My heart is open to your prayers, and I receive them with favor **because it is I who inspired you** to speak to me in this way. This is the secret of prayer pleasing to my heart: it rises out of a grace that I have **already planted in the soul**, even before you come to my presence, even before you open your mouth, or take up your pen, or begin to formulate words.

These are the prayers that I answer most readily; these are the prayers that I answer unfailingly because they are the fruits of the **work of the Holy Spirit in the soul**, teaching the soul to pray in **perfect harmony with the desire and designs of My own Sacred Heart**.

Yield to the **prayer of the Holy Spirit** by whom you will pray as you ought, by whose grace your prayers rise like incense in my sight. **This was the secret of the saints** when they sought me in prayer; **little by little their own ways of praying, gave way to a divine way of praying**, to the ineffable sighs and groanings of my Holy Spirit within them. Some of my saints were able, in fact, to **translate this Spirit-given prayer into words**; and so, the church has been enriched with a treasury of prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit; prayers that glorify my Father, prayers that touch My Heart and move me to compassion.

Pray in this way. Surrender to the Holy Spirit, allow the Holy Spirit to cause prayer to well up within you like a fountain of living water. This is the prayer **that flowers into adoration** in spirit and in truth. This is the prayer that the Church has enshrined and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, expresses in a new and living way, in the **celebration of Sacred liturgy**.

I want to bestow this gift of prayer on you. I want to send upon you my Holy Spirit to create in your heart a prayer that is in every way **conformed to the prayer of My own Heart to the Father** and to **my will for your life and for your eternity**.

Humble yourself, then in my presence and receive this **gift of prayer**, not as something human, not as an ability that comes from your nature, but it is **a divine gift**, and a **manifestation of the Holy Spirit** in your nature, even in your brokenness, marked by sin, and, in the past, darkened by collusion with evil.

Now, I call you, **I bring you into the pure light of a new life in my Eucharistic presence**, and, in order to fill this life with my gifts, **I impart a grace of prayer** by which **you will learn to open** yourself to all that, I desire to give you. Be grateful, then, and open yourself to the Holy Spirit. Call upon the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, through my Mother's Immaculate Heart, and you will experience the surprising joy of His presence.

(The Holy Spirit)



The Catholic priest

*Pastoral Letter of Monsignor Bishop of Piacenza,^f
or Holy Lent of the year 1892*

INTRODUCTION

(To better understand this Pastoral Letter, we must remember the environment in which St. John Baptist Scalabrini is writing. The Italian government declaredly “Freemason” was arrayed against the ecclesiastical hierarchy; about the so called “workers’ question” this movement was leading the working class into a proletarian struggle against the rich employers, the oppressive class of which the church was believed to part of).

THE MAIN TOPICS

1. It is the priest who **brings humanity to God**, because he offers Him the prayers and sufferings of the world by inserting them into Christ's sacrifice.
2. The priest **brings God to man** by communicating to him the revealed truth; he gives God's own life with grace through the sacraments; the priest is Christ who in man speaks, forgives, and saves.
3. The priest also has a **social function** because he promotes institutions which throughout history constitute the glory of civilized nations. In his own country the priest guarantees the **peaceful coexistence** of citizens because he defends religious principles, proposing an effective law which is eternal; they ensure the moral life without which an orderly community is impossible.
4. **Man does not always understand the mission of the priest.** The latter must even **beg him to grant them as a grace the consent to do him good.**
5. The minister of God unites employers and employees together with charity that rejects hatred and class struggle and defines their rights in terms of justice; The author also recalls the encyclical “Rerum Novarum” of Leo XIII (1891).

A QUOTE FROM THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER LAMARTINE:

“In every parish you find a man, who has no family of his own, but who belongs to everyone's family, who is called as a witness, as an adviser, and as an operator in the most solemn acts of civil life, without whom one is not born and he never dies, since he receives man from his mother's womb, nor does he ever abandon him again, except in the tomb; who blesses and sanctifies the bed and cradle, the deathbed and the coffin; a man that children grow accustomed to

love, to venerate, to fear; that strangers still call their father, at whose feet Christians manifest their most intimate secrets, their most hidden tears; a man who by his condition is the comforter of all miseries of soul and body, the direct mediator between riches and indigence, who now sees the poor and now the wealthy knocking at his door; the wealthy to secretly give alms and the poor to receive it without blushing; a man who, without belonging to any social class, belongs to all without distinction; to the lower classes for his poor life, and often for the humility of his birth; then to the higher classes by virtue of education, knowledge, nobility of affection, inspired and commanded by a religion that is all charity; in short, a man who knows everything, who has the right to say everything, and whose word descends from above upon human intellects and hearts with the authority of a divine mission and with the command of a sublime faith."

In ancient times there was nothing more important than priests, nothing was undertaken without the priest. And the priest was wanted everywhere, he was called everywhere, he entered everywhere, and now?

Now he is **vilified above all in society**, putting him in a bad light among the people, in private and in the public; they laugh at him, they insult him, they mock him; therefore, they study to **remove him** from public administrations, from charitable works, from hospitals, from schools, from professorships, from the army, from associations, from academies, from clubs, from families, and even from the dying.

THIS IS WHY I FEEL COMPELLED TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE CATHOLIC PRIEST

*"The harvest is plentiful; the workers are few".
May the Lord send others in good numbers into his harvest.*

1. Of all the offices that man is called to perform on earth, there is **none that can be compared** to the Catholic priesthood. The royal majesty itself is obliged to bow before the priestly majesty. Bodies are subject to kings, souls to priests.

The priest rises higher: with his ministry he touches the divine order itself and penetrates into eternity.
2. He, on the other hand, is God's coadjutor, his ambassador, his lieutenant, the interpreter of his will, the advocate of his mercy, the depositary of his holy mysteries, the dispenser of his graces.
3. **A double current of sacred things flows from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth.** From earth to heaven the religious acts of humanity, from heaven to earth the blessings of God. It is in the priest that these holy things are encountered. The priest speaks and deals in the name of men, he speaks and deals in the name of God. **A man of the church, a man of God**, in this double office he represents the universal and eternal priest, Christ the Lord, source of all priesthood.

4. The sacred thing of humanity is **prayer**.

- The priest, the sacred man, approaches the altar, extends his arms and says let us pray.

- **We want** to praise the majesty of the Lord, adore the ineffable mystery of his life, sing the glory of the Trinity, it is the priest who intones the canticle and unites in one concert of thousand voices: "*Te Deum Laudamus*".

- **We want**, miserable sinners, to divert from our social life, in which crime, rods and scourges of divine justice triumph, it is the priest who weeps for us between the vestibule and the altar and cries out for mercy: "Lord, have mercy on your people".

- **We want** to open the fertile springs from which divine grace is poured on the afflictions, on the miseries of our soul, also on the souls of our deceased loved ones, it is the priest who, under a thousand solemn and at the same time moving forms, will interpret our wishes and transmit them to God who must hear them.

5. But another thing infinitely more sacred than prayer has humanity: **sacrifice**.

In the sacrifice is summed up the worship that man owes to his creator, Supreme Being, to the master of life and death.

- **Humankind needed a sacrifice**, which would pay God the homage required by his infinite perfection and repair the offense done to him by the crimes of all peoples, of all ages. But how could the guilty man atone for his own sins and the sins of others? A victim was therefore needed, but an innocent one, a victim of infinite value. And here is the Word clothed for us in human flesh, sacrificing himself for us on the altar of the cross, making himself our redemption, our salvation, becoming our thing.

- I contemplate the priest in the solemn and decisive moment of the Holy Sacrifice; He is standing there, in the middle of the altar, raises his eyes to heaven, blesses a small piece of bread, a cup of wine, bends down and says: "This is my body, This is my blood", and behold in his hands the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharistic sacrifice and that of the cross are essentially one and the same sacrifice: in both the same victim, the same priest, different only in the way of offering.

6. Think well, therefore, dearest children, every mass that is celebrated is the work of our redemption which is renewed, but is only renewed through the priest. **The mass is like the sun of Christianity**, the soul, the center of our most holy religion, the most sublime and august mystery of our faith, the most sacred of the functions that can be celebrated on earth, the action par excellence; but an eminently priestly action.

A mass is the compendium of ancient offices, in which the current of religious acts that united humanity with God took place; unique sacrifice, holocaust together and peaceful wafer of the cross that approaches us, to

spare our faith a tiring return to a distant past that is easily in vain due to our weakness and negligence.

A mass is a creator God, a God who thanks, a God who placates, a God who implores.

Once again, a mass is the crown of religious worship, at the center of the Christian life, the most splendid seal of the greatness and power of the priest.

Personification of the Christian people, the priest offers God the sacred things that are in the world. The personification of Jesus Christ, he bestows upon the world the sacred things of God.

7. But what to answer to the **questions concerning our existence**? It is about knowing who we are and for that purpose created. What is our life? Where do we live, where do we come from, where do we go? Why the pain down here? Why social inequalities? Why death? What will happen to this body of ours one day? And what about this soul? To these I see other similar questions that face our reason terribly and tire it in vain, we need an answer that admits of no doubt. Man needs it absolutely. Is there such an answer?

Yes, dearly beloved, it exists: **they are the truths condensed in that little book, which we call the catechism** and which, despite its humble appearance, is the popular code of the highest philosophy, as Lamartine so well defined it.

"Truth about the life and inner workings of God; truths are mysteries of the invisible world; truth about God's supernatural relationship with his creature; truth about the eternal plan according to which these operations are ordered; truth about the primitive condition of humanity in its source; truth about the catastrophe that leads us into an abyss of misery; truth of the great acts for which God enters into intimate relations with sinful man;" **it is the priestly office which consists precisely in giving the world the truths of God.** The priest, therefore, is truly the man of God in the communication of the truth.

8. Besides the truth, my dear children, there is another sacred thing that the priest gives to men in the name of God: **grace**; a completely free gift that lifts the heart, creates and feeds.

But an even greater gift when he performs sacred things, of which the priest is the dispenser; it is not only the **participatory life of God that he gives to souls**: it is substantial life, God himself, God in person. To the soul thirsting for divine life he says: "Behold the Lamb of God, receive and eat, May the body of Christ feed you and preserve you for eternal life".

What man is this who holds the life and fate of souls in his hand and in some way the fate of a God? Once again, behold, dear ones, the dignity and power of the Catholic priest.

9. **The priest is not only the man of the church, the man of God; he is the social man** par excellence. The priest participates in the individual, in the treasures of divine grace; he helps him to observe the duties he has with God and with his neighbor, and pushes him to the most arduous undertakings.

It is not to say how much and for how many leaders **religion has a salutary influence** in society. Religion is that which, penetrating the depths of everyone's conscience, makes him feel the **strength of duty** and pushes him to follow it. Religion is that which gives the prince feelings of justice and love for their subjects; which makes subjects faithful and sincerely devoted to them, which makes legislators righteous and good, magistrates just and incorrupt, soldiers valiant to the point of heroism, administrators conscientious and diligent. Religion is that which makes harmony and affection reign **between spouses**, love and reverence **between parents and children**, which gives the poor respect for the goods of others and the rich the correct use of their substances. From this **fidelity to duties** and this **respect for the rights of others** arises order, tranquility, peace, which are so much a part of the prosperity of a people and of a state.

There is no freedom without law, no law without morals, no morals without religion, no religion without priests. Voltaire said: "To maintain good order, the simple curate is worth much more than a company of grenadiers."

To work, toil, sacrifice in every way to expand the kingdom of God down here and save souls; to get, so to speak, on his knees before the world to implore as a grace the permission to give him a penis, that is the only ambition of the priest.

But no less terrible than bloody battles are the **battles of the spirit**, the battles that the fire of human passions often kindles.

10. **Today it is the workers' question that holds the field and often threatens public order.**

To the revolutionary flood that would like to overwhelm everything in its way: kings, the rich, superiors, God himself; no other remedy is possible and the priest is necessary; the priest who orders everything to God; the priest who consecrates the authority of kings and sanctifies it to make it inviolable, but responsible for the good of his subjects, who are a people of God; the priest who blesses and respects riches as long as they are paid to relieve the poor under pain of terrible curses; the priests whom masters and servants **owners and proletarians** bind with bonds of charity and subordinate to the same laws of justice

And who can tell me what would happen to the individual, the family, society, if the priest weren't there? Without a priest who could offer sacrifices, who could bless your families, your fields, your sweats and your rest? You would look in vain for who was the interpreter of the divine will among the people, who would teach everyone, starting from childhood, the great

mysteries of their origin, their state, their purpose, and their duties; you would look in vain for who was the bearer of divine mercy to all unfortunate creatures.

So why so much war on the priest? Because the priest is the living censorship of passions, vices, crimes. Why do they hate the priest? Because the priest preaches humility in greatness, justice in power, respect for the rights of all, moderation in desires, contempt for honors, detachment from riches, renunciation of pleasures, mortification of the senses; because he enlightens the people who deceive themselves, and defends the weak who want to corrupt themselves; because he is the promoter, the organizer, the support of the works of zeal and charity, which put a stop to quarrels and abuses. The priest reminds the powerful of that God, whose yoke they try to shake off; because the priest is God himself, God witness and judge of their prevarications and their hardening. Here you are, very direct, the secret of their anger and their dark designs. Observe carefully and you will find that neither reason nor virtue ever wage war against the priest.

They accuse him of wanting to perpetuate the reign of ignorance and superstition: lie! To oppose civil progress: lie! To dream of the ruin of the holiest liberties: lie! To be an enemy of the fatherland: a lie!

11. God, for a stretch of his infinite goodness, has chosen his ministers not already among the angels, **but among men, that is, among creatures full of infirmity and imperfection**, shaped by the common clay of Adam, exposed like all the others, and often even more than the others, at the impact of passions. We must not forget that God, in communicating his powers to the priests, **did not communicate his impeccability to them.**

My most beloved children, the priests, as we have seen, God has placed them on earth for the common benefit; if here below they are his ambassadors, the vicegerents of Christ, the ministers of his mercy, **what shall be our duties towards them?**

- **Close your ears** to the malign insinuations that art spread about them; remove from your homes those booklets and newspapers which seem to find no pleasure other than throwing mud in the face of the clergy; teach your children in time to have priests in that esteem, in that account in which you must have them.

- As sacred ministers, those who are especially in charge of the government of your souls, you must **also listen to them:** listen to them when they teach, listen to them when they preach, listen to them when they condemn.

- **Have recourse to them**, dear ones, if you want to walk calmly and securely on the path to health.

- **Then keep closely united to the sacred shepherds:** united in mind, united in heart, as we all must be united in mind and heart with the shepherd of shepherds, the Roman pontiff.

- **You have to help them** even more. They are aids of comfort, of encouragement, of words, of offerings, of prayers that they, poor priests, rightfully expect from you. You must help them above all by providing them with other companions in their labors, other fellow soldiers, who will have to fill the void left by those who die.

RELIGION IS FOR EVERYONE'S BENEFIT AND THEREFORE IT MUST BE EVERYONE'S DEFENSE

The priest who sacrifices his whole self to his duty saves religion, society and the dignity of man. -He saves religion because he has this exclusive privilege of Catholicism.

He saves society because society cannot exist except through the continuous rotation and exchange of rights and duties which have their guarantee, their solution, their basis in religion. - -He finally saves human dignity because he saves freedom, directing it to the truth, and informing it to the good.

And now a word to you, my dear friends, **zealous cooperators**, dear **parish priests**. Thinking of our dignity and our misery, Jesus must inflame us with holy ardor for the salvation of our brothers, to heal the wounds of the present society and infuse new blood into its veins. Society needs you to restore its peace, to restore the hopes of heaven.

- **Commit yourselves** more and more into the revelations of the truths revealed in each type of **study**.

- **Love one another**, help one another, be men of sacrifice, be among those who, according to the apostle, "bring the mystery of faith into a pure conscience".

Watch over, o brothers, for the peace of families, for the sanctity of marriages, for the respect of holidays, for the decorum of the house of God, for the reverence of superiors, for the loyalty of trades, for the observance of justice.

Pity everyone's faults, love everyone, do good to everyone, everyone without exception. Imitate the good shepherd. Abhor the vice, never the culprit. Altogether, beware of excessive compliance or **grim rigidity**.

I COMMEND THE CHILDREN TO YOUR CARE IN A SPECIAL WAY AND THE WORKERS

Those affectionately gather around you and with industrious, tireless solicitude, instruct in the rudiments of the faith, inform in every way of virtue; these (the workers) unite in fraternal associations, educate about the merit and nobility of work; guard against the arts of troublemakers and the seduction of the wicked.

But with regard to all this **I feel secure**, venerable shepherds of souls, because the evangelical spirit which guides you in your ministry is a sufficient guarantee of your work for me.

Pray unceasingly to merciful God for the first of the shepherds, the pontifex maximus, Leo XIII; **Pray him also for me** to help me worthily bear the heavy burden of the pastoral ministry for the glory of God, for the sake of all of you, dearest brothers and sons, who are my joy and my crown.

I impart to you with all the sentiments of my soul the pastoral blessing: In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Piacenza, from the bishop's palace, February 15, 1892

John Baptist bishop

