
"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 386

Pope Francis on priestly formation

"A priest is first of all a man with his own humanity, who knows his own history – with its treasures and wounds"

Pope Francis, on 20th Nov 2015, said that a good priest "creates serenity," and that a priest "who is often sad, nervous, or has a hard character" is not good for himself or his people. He was addressing a conference sponsored by the *Congregation for the Clergy* marking the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the Vat II decrees *Presbyterorum ordinis* [On the Ministry and Life of Priests] and *Optatam Totius* [On Priestly Training].



Pope Francis focused on three brief phrases found in a passage of *Presbyterorum ordinis*, stating that priests are "taken from among men," "ordained for men," and "live in the midst of other men."

“...taken from among men”

“Even priests have a biography, and are not ‘mushrooms’ which sprout up suddenly at the Cathedral on their day of ordination....It is important for formators and the priests themselves to remember this, and know how to take this personal history into account along the formation path.”

It is a very significant point. Priests and consecrated persons are not born angels; they carry with them all the blessings and fragilities of their humanity and culture. The personal history of each individual provides, in fact, the most valuable material for formation because it is in this personal “exodus” of each one of us that we discover the saving and loving action of God.

The Pope added that the “fundamental place” of human formation for the priesthood is the family, which is the “centre of pastoral work” and can do much to foster vocations

“A good priest is first of all a man with his own humanity, who knows his own history – with its treasures and wounds – and has learned to make peace with it, gaining a profound serenity, characteristic of a disciple of the Lord,” he said. “Human formation is therefore needed for priests, so they may learn not to be dominated by their limits, but rather to put their talents to use.”

The human being becomes a person only through relationships. That is why his or her first experience of the family in an environment of love and trust is so vital in the formation of self. Discovering the “treasures and wounds” of each human person is a life-long process and hence the importance of ongoing formation. Only a formation process that is intense, long and accompanied by persons who have good experience and knowledge of the dynamics of the Holy Spirit and the human self can be helpful in this process.

The Pope said that a priest is “a man of peace” who surrounds himself with serenity, even during hardships. “It is not normal for a priest to be often sad, nervous, or of a hard character; it is not good, and does no good, neither for the priest nor for his people,” he said.

Pope Francis said “our humanity is the ‘clay pot’ in which we guard the treasure of God,” and so care must be taken to protect it.

Generally, we find a certain hesitation to accept our humanity in Christian spirituality. While our vocation is to be “holy as our Heavenly Father is perfect”, we need to be humble enough to realise and accept that we are a pilgrim people moving toward the Promised Land, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Any attempt to take short cuts to sainthood or even deny the mystery of the Paschal Mystery can only lead to illusion, desperation and depression. We have no other pedagogy of Christian discipleship other than the one followed by our Master himself – suffering, death and resurrection! Only such a path to perfection can give us lasting peace and joy.

“...ordained for men”

Moving to the second point, the Holy Father reminded priests they are called “to serve our brothers and sisters.”

“We are not priests for our own sake, and our sanctification is closely linked to that of our people, our anointing to their anointing...[priests should be] authoritative, not authoritarian; firm, but not hard; joyful, but not superficial...in short, shepherds, not functionaries.”

“...live in the midst of other men”

Finally, turning to the third point, Pope Francis said priests must remain with their people, and not treat the priesthood “like a job one does, and afterwards lives a life apart.”

“The good that priests can do comes primarily from their proximity to – and a tender love for – their people.....They are not philanthropists or functionaries, but fathers and brothers.”

His words remind us of the constant exhortation of our Founder, St Vincent Pallotti contained in these words:

“A person who believes in Jesus Christ and strives to imitate him with humble confidence, will discover that Christ removes from him all his faults and failings. Jesus Christ enters the soul and continues and applies to him the merits of his most holy works (OCCC III, 37)”.



I wish to bring to your notice with joy that the priest seen in this Conference photo [left], in the front row along with the Cardinals, is indeed a Pallottine confrere, **Fr George Augustin sac**, a member of the *Epiphany Province* and Professor of Fundamental and Theology and Dogmatics at our Philosophical and Theological Institute in Germany.

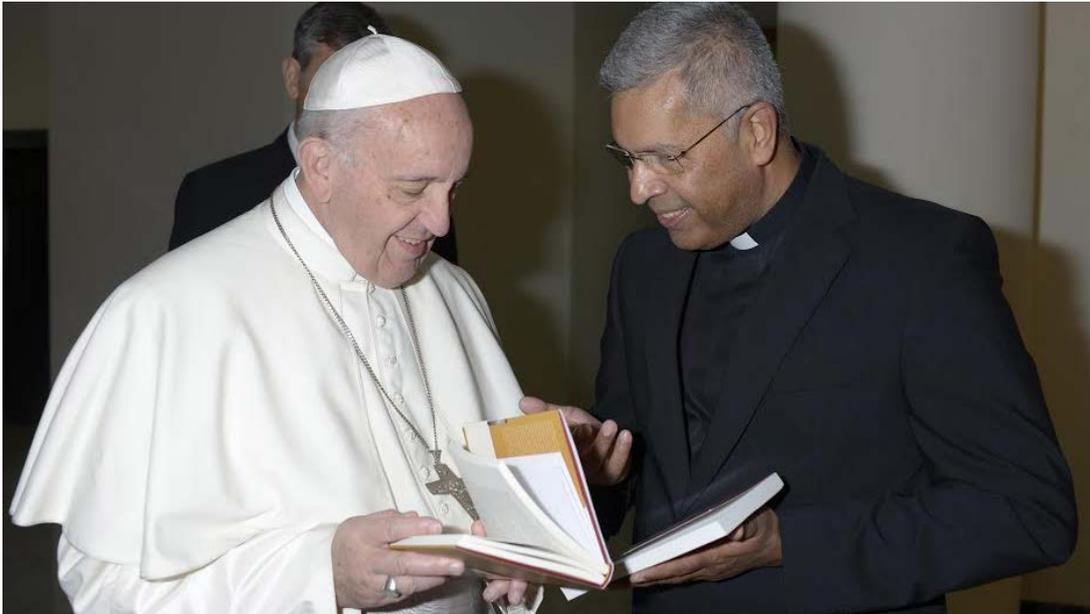
Opening the very first session Fr George was invited to address the conference on “*Optatam Totius* 50 years later: genesis, development, actuality”.

Earlier, on 16 Nov. after Mass at Santa Martha, Fr Augustin presented to Pope Francis his new book on *Evangelii Gaudium* which deals with the missionary aspects in the spirit of his Apostolic Exhortation. They were received with much joy, the Pope remarking that *Evangelii Gaudium* was his programme for renewal of faith in the Church. Hence he thanked Fr George for continuing to focus on his pastoral priority. It is not easy for anyone to get an opportunity to spend five minutes with the Holy Father, as he did, and hence his achievements should be a matter of joy and pride for the entire Pallottine Family. For me personally it was a happy moment as we completed our seminary formation together, residing in the same room for 6 years!

Commenting on his book – “Called to Joy. Celebrating Priesthood” – Cardinal Kasper said:

“George Augustin is not satisfied with superficialities and offers none of the trite recipes that have gained currency. He presses forward to essentials, tracing out the deeper dimension of joy in the priestly ministry and the message of joy that the priest is privileged to deliver and himself to radiate. He unearths buried and largely forgotten treasures and brings them to new light. He points to the core of the priestly ministry, the special friendship with Jesus Christ and participation in His priesthood. He speaks of the participation in the life of God, indeed a new enthusiasm for God. He tells us what church – despite many distortions, misunderstandings, and occasional abuses – actually is, namely communion, centred in the celebration of the Eucharist...For George Augustin, this is no matter of abstract, implausible theses or ideological superstructure, but the testimony of his own experience and a concrete invitation and encouragement to become and be a priest”.

Indeed, the special friendship with Jesus Christ and participation in his priesthood, the participation in the life of God, alone can be the source of a lasting and profound joy for all the Christians and the true motive for a new enthusiasm for God and His People.



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sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on #202 Sr Jensy's reflections on the stages of the sufferer and their family moving through terminal illness are, as you say, very sobering but also very insightful - and ultimately hopeful. Thank you for publishing this.

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