

**“WHAT A BISHOP CAN TELL HIS PRIESTS”**  
**Speech Given at the International Symposium**  
**“Living today the prophetic vision of Humanae Vitae and Veritatis Splendor”**  
**15-16 November 2018; Schloss Trumau, Austria**

**Introduction: What We Saw at the Revolution**

When the Holy Father promulgated the document, it created a firestorm. A leader from an association of Protestant mainline denominations called it “the most important encyclical ever promulgated in the entire history of the papal succession.” He said, “It will mark a new era in wide and deep-going revolt against ecclesiastical control. It will bring ... nearer a revolt within the Roman Catholic Church.” He said this attempt by the Church, with its “autocratic domination,” to interfere with private and intimate matters will push it closer to its own inevitable collapse. This exercise of “hierarchical power” would certainly be met with “indignant repudiation” by Catholics themselves. A doctor said the document was “confusing,” especially when it came to the issue of the health and welfare of the mother. He disagreed with the encyclical that claimed contraception violates nature. And he observed that the declining birth-rate among Catholics indicated that the rule was “being more observed in the breach.” A pastor of a non-denominational church in New York said the encyclical was an example of “a tenth-century mind at work on twentieth-century problems.”

Strangely, when many Catholic bishops and priests were asked for their comments, they declined. However, a prominent Catholic layman from England agreed to be interviewed. He said the encyclical “compels us to squarely face the question whether the world would really be happier under the sexual anarchy advocated by the vociferous minority or living in conformity with the rules prescribed by the Church.” He argued that all the problems swirling around the issue of sex were the result of “the neglect of Catholic morality and not because of it.” “The

“*What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests*” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)

quarrel of the sexes is not occasioned by the Church. It is due to not taking the advice of the Church, which tells the husband, ‘Honor your wife,’ and the wife, ‘Honor your husband.’” The encyclical in question was *Casti Connubii* (“On Christian Marriage”). The pope was Pius XI. The year was 1930. The layman was G. K. Chesterton.<sup>1</sup>

I want to make a more serious point later in my talk about this document, but I begin with it to show that the uproar associated with the publication of *Humanae vitae* fifty years ago was not entirely unprecedented. But if you are my age or older, the memories are still very vivid of those tumultuous years. They were years that turned out to be filled with empty promises, promises of liberation and a new social order in the midst of social upheaval. The advent of the birth control pill right at this same time made it seem like a done deal, with the new normal baked into society: there are really no differences between men and women other than a few incidental anatomical features, and now women are finally free to be just like men in every way, even to the point of being able to get away with being just as sexually irresponsible as men. Sex is for fun, and now women can have just as much fun as men without the consequence; after all, they want it just as much as men. It was an age of glee: people are finally freed from the strictures and shackles of an oppressive moral code, and can indulge themselves without incurring the scorn of society.

That was the promise. Somehow, though, it didn’t work out that way. Now, fifty years later, we are witnessing the explosion of news stories about sexual harassment of women by men in all different walks of life: entertainment, politics, news media, sports, you name it. In my own country of the United States, the unending revelations of such stories gave birth to the “#metoo”

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ahlquist, *Crisis Magazine* June 11, 2015.

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

movement over a year ago – a movement of women who are shattering the secrecy of the sexual harassment they have suffered from men and are speaking out in protest against it, especially through the use of social media – and it has remained headline news all this time. Why is it that it’s overwhelmingly women who suffer from sexual harassment? We don’t really think of men suffering when a woman makes uninvited sexual advances towards him, do we? The very suggestion of it will draw a chuckle, because we all know that, for some reason, *most men really like that*. But it’s a different thing when a man makes such advances toward a woman. For fifty years the culture has been telling us the opposite, and now all of a sudden women are standing up in protest against it. I think this has come as a shock to a lot of men, given the unrelenting narrative of the sexual revolution. Everyone is admitting that this is a big problem, but no one dares to suggest that maybe it’s the very narrative that is wrong.

### **Priests Then: on the Front Line**

That is the “then and now” background of what we are about at this symposium. I have been asked to speak about what a bishop can say to his priests about these matters. The tumultuous era ushered in by “the 60s” found priests on the front line, not only in regards to contraception and the moral teachings of the Church, but dealing with profound confusion regarding Catholic doctrine and liturgical practice. Priests trained before the Council were schooled in the theology of the manuals and trained to follow very precise rubrics for every action of the liturgy. This entire apparatus was abandoned almost overnight. Theologians spoke in entirely new categories, and freewheeling liturgies became the order of the day. Social upheavals in the wider culture found their echo in an ecclesial culture which consciously and deliberately moved out of “the Catholic ghetto” to engage the world. The Council fathers

“*What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests*” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)

envisioned a Church capable of preaching the Gospel with confidence to the many diverse cultures of the modern world. They rightly saw that it was not enough for the Church to preserve the Tradition she had received; she was founded by Christ precisely for mission, and needed to engage the exigencies of proclaiming the Gospel in a modern idiom to the modern world. Unfortunately, in the process of all this the social confusion present in the wider world found its way into the Church as well.

What added to the difficulties of priests was that the teaching of *Humanae vitae* was not only challenged by their parishioners, but by leading voices in the Church. Not only prominent theologians but even bishops voiced objections. Recently Fr. Serafino Lanzetta has chronicled the dissent:

Cardinals, bishops and episcopates took an active role in this rebellion. The primate of Belgium, Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, after the publication of the encyclical, managed to make the whole Belgian Episcopate publish a declaration in opposition to “*Humanae vitae*,” supposedly in the name of freedom of conscience. This declaration, together with the one formulated by the German Episcopate, served as a template for the protests of other episcopates. Cardinal John C. Heenan of Westminster described the release of Pope Giovanni Battista Montini’s encyclical on the transmission of life as ‘the greatest shock since the Reformation.’ Cardinal Bernard Alfrink, together with nine other Dutch bishops, even voted in favour of the Independence Declaration, which invited the people of God to reject the ban on contraception.<sup>2</sup>

### **Priests Now: In the Eye of the Storm**

Fr. Lanzetta suggests that opposition to *Humanae vitae* helped to create the context of the sexual abuse crisis currently afflicting the Church. I don’t think a more honest assessment

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<sup>2</sup> “At the Root of Today’s Church Crises”, *L’Espresso Settimo Cielo*, Oct 5, 2018.

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

could be made, if we really think honestly and deeply about this. Mind you, I’m not speaking about the psychological disorder of pedophilia, that is, attraction to prepubescent children. That scourge, sadly, has always been around. But the current sexual abuse crisis we are facing now has to do with pubescent and post-pubescent minors, something quite different. Admittedly, this, too, also has always been a problem in society and even in the Church. But in the last 50 years the incidents of such abuse have exploded at an unprecedented rate. The rejection of *Humanae vitae* ultimately comes down to rejection of a proper and ordered understanding of the purpose of human sexuality. Once the pleasure principle becomes the overriding consideration, the door is open for deviance of every kind.

This crisis is being felt very keenly in the United States, resulting from a convergence of a number of distressing news reports: the abuse perpetrated by the former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and its cover-up as he climbed the ecclesial ladder; the publication of a report of a grand jury in the state of Pennsylvania exposing horrendous stories of abuse of minors by priests in the past and the mishandling of some of those cases; the “Testimonies” of the former Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, alleging networks of homosexual prelates and cover-up at the highest levels of Church authority; and, now, more recent reports of abuse of minors by priests and bishops, and mishandling of such cases, since 2002, when the U.S. bishops approved the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” which put strict procedures in place with systems of accountability, and adopted the so-called “zero tolerance” policy (a cleric is removed permanently from ministry for one act of sexual abuse of a minor). Lay people in my country are making their voices heard, and demand that they be heard.

Over the past few weeks, therefore, I have been meeting with various groups of parishioners within my Archdiocese to hear their concerns and answer their questions. The

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

divisions we hear about in the Church manifested themselves to me very clearly throughout the course of these listening sessions. Two clear camps emerged: according to one, the problem is homosexuality in the clergy, and no one is admitting it, and it has to be admitted, addressed and eradicated if this problem is going to be solved; according to the other camp, the problem is a celibate, all-male hierarchy, and the solution is to admit married men as priests and bishops and to ordain women as well to all ranks of Holy Orders, because women would never allow such a thing to happen. I will admit that there is some truth to both of these analyses, but simplistic solutions don't work for complex problems.

For example, it certainly cannot be denied that there are many in the clergy who have a homosexual orientation, and that the percentage of such homosexual clergy has increased over the past several decades. It also cannot be denied that there has been, in many seminaries, a homosexual subculture in which sexual acting out was enabled. The study that the U.S. bishops commissioned on the nature and scope of this problem by the highly reputable John J. College of Criminal Justice found that 80% of the abuse was perpetrated against pubescent and postpubescent males. However, they concluded that this abuse was perpetrated not by priests who had a clearly identified homosexual orientation, but rather by priests who were confused about their sexual identity and acted out with the children they had most readily available, which would have been boys because, at that time, only boys served Mass. Other professionals in the field, however, disagreed with this conclusion, asserting that there is a clear link of abuse with the prevalence of homosexual clergy. A recent study by the Rev. Paul Sullins, a sociology professor at the Catholic University of America, finds a very high correlation between homosexuality in the clergy and sexual abuse of minors.<sup>3</sup> However, it is a standard principle of

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. “Is Catholic Clergy Sex Abuse Related to Homosexual Priests?”, in *National Catholic Register*, Nov. 2, 2018, at <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/is-catholic-clergy-sex-abuse-related-to-homosexual-priests>.

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

social science that correlation does not necessarily mean causation. Causation is a more complex thing. There are homosexual priests who do not abuse, and heterosexual priests who do. Father Sullins is certainly onto something here, and it is an important first step to getting to the root of the problem. Directly equating homosexuality with sexual abuse of minors, however, does not get us there. A deeper analysis is necessary.

Likewise, we have to admit that sometimes networks of priests and, especially bishops, act more like what we colloquially call in the United States an “old boys’ club” than as men selflessly serving the Church. But this is a human problem, not exclusive to men. Nor to celibates, for that matter. Surveys show that Catholic clergy do not abuse minors at a higher rate than clergy of other religions, and actually at a lower rate than some others. And it is common knowledge that the vast majority of abuse occurs in the home, that is, by men who are not celibate. So there is not even a *correlation* between celibacy and sexual abuse of minors; these facts, however, do not satisfy some people. But here again, to take a simplistic answer to a complex problem will not solve the problem. Incidentally, by the way, I recently had over to my home for dinner three very smart and faithful women of the Church, who are making great contributions to the Church from the positions they hold in teaching and administration. When this topic came up in conversation, and I mentioned how, I admit, bishops can act like an old boys’ club and this can do a lot of harm; I then added, “But I’ve also seen old girls’ clubs.” *Their* response to *me* was, “And they can sometimes do more harm than the old boys’ clubs”!

My analysis? What I said a moment ago: Fr. Lanzetta is right. A distorted, materialistic, pleasure-principle notion of human sexuality undermines the virtue of chastity. What we need is to reclaim formation in the virtue of chastity, properly understood: loving in the way God created love to be; at every moment and in every way affirming the intrinsic dignity of the other and

“*What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests*” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)

never using the other as a means to one’s own selfish ends, as St. John Paul II so poignantly taught us. Sadly, the dominant culture sees chastity as a negative, an oppression; indeed, some young people have never even heard the word, let alone have an even incorrect concept of it. But properly understood, chastity is a foundational virtue, because it forms one into a person capable of giving and receiving love. It is a sin to be ashamed of this teaching of the Church, and to refrain from speaking and teaching about it; we have a moral obligation to form our people, and especially our young people, in this virtue. If we have conviction in this being true, we will know how to do it with courage and compassion.

### **What Can A Bishop Say to His Priests?**

It is an understatement to say that we bishops and priests find ourselves in a very difficult situation. The moral credibility of the Catholic Church has been severely damaged. The vast majority of even practicing Catholics find their moral values and thinking about issues facing the Church shaped far more by the secular culture than by our Catholic teaching. If there was ever any doubt, my experience of those listening sessions cleared that up. What can a bishop say to his priests as we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Humanae vitae*? My observations thus far have set me up for my comments to follow, the essential purpose of this presentation.

First, and most importantly, we bishops need to re-instill in our priests a spirit of discipleship that embraces the cross. Much of the malaise facing the Church in – as it likes to call itself – “the developed world,” is due to a tendency in every aspect of the life of the Church for the past 50 years to empty the cross of its meaning. In large issues and small, accommodation has been the order of the day. This tendency may be explained in part by either the reality or the perception that Catholic life before the Council was excessively burdensome.

“*What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests*” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)

Be that as it may, what we have seen in the past 50 years is a lessening, and even the disappearance, of a spirit of sacrifice in the life of the Church.

Ignatius Press has recently published a book entitled, *Priests – What Lies Ahead? A Dialogue of Carlos Granados with Luis F. Ladaria, George Pell, Livio Melina, and Charles J. Chaput*. I was struck by Cardinal Pell’s observations on the very point I have been trying to make here. He said:

Progress in Christianity comes from people embracing the cross. And through the cross you come to redemption and rejoicing and resurrection. Jesus did not have only success when he preached the gospel; he was rejected and crucified and assured us that the world would hate us. By preaching and accepting the cross, by our Christian witness of charity and forgiveness, this is the way to bring salvation to the world and come to the resurrection.<sup>4</sup>

Cardinal Pell gets to the crux of the matter here – pun intended! So much of the rejection of *Humanae vitae* and the whole body of the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood and sexual morality in general is really a rejection of the cross. Our fallen human nature instinctively wants to flee from the cross, and yet, as he points out, it is the only way to salvation. The last thing we need in the world today are excuses for people to flee from the cross. By embracing the cross, one grows in the virtue needed to, as St. Paul puts it, “be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

Second, we must help our priests recover confidence in the moral vision and profound teachings of the Catholic faith. They must be equipped to present persuasively what the Church

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<sup>4</sup> *Priests – What Lies Ahead? A Dialogue of Carlos Granados with Luis F. Ladaria, George Pell, Livio Melina, and Charles J. Chaput*, trans. Richard Goodyear (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018) 74.

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

teaches on faith and morals. This means, among other things, learning or relearning how the Church’s moral vision has grown organically over the centuries. This touches on the essential importance of “the hermeneutic of continuity” when it comes to interpreting the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents. I began this talk by making reference to the encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian marriage. This important document provides the context for understanding *Humanae vitae*, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, *Veritatis splendor*, and *Amoris laetitia*. If our priests are not well grounded in what the Church teaches and why, they will be ill-equipped to hand on that teaching to the people entrusted to their care. And such teaching is one of the most essential ministries of a parish priest.

We all have known people – and perhaps for some of you it has been your own personal experience – who have been won over by the surprising wisdom of the Church’s timeless teaching. Many grew up indoctrinated in the typical secular orthodoxy that is forced on us today – all of those myths of the sexual revolution I mentioned at the beginning of this talk – and were convinced of the rightness of it, only to learn that they were duped after discovering what the Church *really* teaches *and why*. Often this happens after they have done damage to themselves and others in living by the secularized code of conduct. Indeed, one of the most common responses of young people who are granted this grace of understanding is: “Why didn’t anyone tell me this sooner? It would have saved me untold suffering.” Such people make the most ardent disciples, and provide a much-needed witness for many “cradle Catholics.” For those of good faith, who are willing to be challenged and think things through and search sincerely and objectively for the truth, a light goes on.

We, bishops and priests alike, indeed anyone who teaches in the name of the Church, must be animated by the conviction that the Catholic understanding of human nature is true: it is

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

based both on reason and on faith. Armed with that conviction, we will not be cowed in the face of opposition, ridicule, or neglect of Church teaching. To those who oppose Catholic teaching on contraception and a host of other moral topics (and this includes, sad to say, some prominent Catholics), on the grounds that such teaching is burdensome and unrealistic, I would simply invite them to consider the alternative. We do not have to imagine what the world would look like when perennial moral values are abandoned. When Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae vitae*, he prophesied dire consequences if the natural moral law and the truth of Catholic teaching were abandoned. He was dismissed by many as a “prophet of doom,” out of touch with all of the advantages brought to the world by modern science. If anything, events since then have shown that his predictions, while right on the mark, also ended up falling short of the reality.

You are all familiar with these predictions from number 17 of *Humanae vitae*, but it never ceases to startle the conscience when re-read in the light of what is happening in the world today. So allow me to do so:

Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings – and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation – need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere

instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.

Finally, careful consideration should be given to the danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the solution of a particular family difficulty? Who will prevent public authorities from favoring those contraceptive methods which they consider more effective? Should they regard this as necessary, they may even impose their use on everyone. It could well happen, therefore, that when people, either individually or in family or social life, experience the inherent difficulties of the divine law and are determined to avoid them, they may give into the hands of public authorities the power to intervene in the most personal and intimate responsibility of husband and wife.

There is no question that following the moral teaching of the Gospel and the Church creates burdens. And we who are pastors of souls must do all in our power to assist people in bearing the burden of discipleship. But if anyone imagines for a moment that the alternative moral vision symbolized by artificial contraception offers a panacea, he or she need only look around. Embracing the cross is difficult; dropping the cross is catastrophic. And if that is not already obvious from sheer observation, we have 50 years of social science research, with reams and reams of data, linking myriad social ills to the scourge of fatherlessness and family breakdown: higher rates of dropping out of school, incarceration, drug use, promiscuity, and on and on and on.

## **Preaching and Teaching**

So, armed with the facts, and equipped with a deep understanding of God’s vision for human flourishing and the Church’s teaching that helps us appropriate it, we can preach and teach the truth with conviction, courage and compassion. It is incumbent to every bishop, priest and deacon to preach on the hard issues of our time. The urgency of our times demand that we preach consistently on the pro-life issues of our day, countering the culture of death: abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, embryonic stem cell research, and so forth. These, of course, have to be addressed in their proper context of Church teaching and popular mentality. The same can be said about the pressing issues affecting marriage and family life: responsible parenthood and the evil of contraception, the integrity of marriage as between a man and a woman, the moral and social ills of divorce, and so forth.

Along with this goes the need to educate our people on the principle of worthiness to receive Holy Communion. The loss of the sense of the sacred even toward the Most Holy Eucharist has carried with it a loss of understanding of what it means, seeing it as simply a gesture of welcome and belonging, rather than Christ’s one perfect sacrifice made present to us in this moment and of which one must be worthy to receive, that is, in a state of grace. I shudder to think how many Catholics have never even heard that phrase, let alone know what it means.

A bishop needs to say this to his priests, but he can only do so if he has done this himself. It is challenging, but my own experience teaches me that it can be done in a way that is pastorally sensitive and respectful of those who have been harmed, or duped, by the secular orthodoxy. So, for example, in preaching about abortion, it is important to acknowledge the harm that this does to women, and how it contributes to undermining the worthiness of women and the esteem with which they are to be held, bearing in mind that many of the listeners in the

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

congregation will have been personally affected by it. In treating the topic of contraception, it is helpful to cite scientific facts on the harm it can do to the woman’s health, and to the environment for that matter, and how disrespectful this is to women. You see, it all goes together in a harmonious whole, in what both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis often refer to as “human ecology”: the physical, the social, the moral and the spiritual all go together. It is morally wrong because of the physical harm it does, and the corruption it brings about at the spiritual level, which is the deepest part of who we are.

Yes, there will be people who get angry at you. Some people may even walk out. Personally, this has never happened to me. But I know it is happened to others. Far more often, though, I have found that people express appreciation for it. Some people have been waiting for years, even decades, to hear these truths preached from the pulpit. Others who were misled have their eyes opened, and also their minds. They are now open to hearing more about the beauty of the truth the Church holds out for us. As I am fond of saying, if you have never preached a homily that left you thoroughly exhausted, that made you feel like it took a pound of flesh out of you, then you have never really preached.

In addition to preaching, there is teaching. I spoke earlier about the need to form our people in the virtue of chastity. There is no more urgent need with regard to our ministry to young people right now. If we do not commit ourselves to helping them develop this virtue, then we are setting them up for a lifetime of heartache. Do this in concrete ways: in schools where you have influence, in your religious education programs, and your programs of preparing people for the sacraments, especially Confirmation and matrimony. This goes a long, long way in helping our people live an authentic Catholic life. This is especially true with marriage. We must bear in mind that when a couple presents themselves to the Church to be married, 90% of

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

their marriage preparation has already been done. It happens in the home, in their school, and in the wider society. That is why we have to attend to their remote marriage preparation.

This reality came home to me in a very vivid way when I was a pastor many years ago. The parish was in a small town in a rural area, and there was a small high school run by the diocese. A very beloved teacher who was quite fervent in his faith did a wonderful job forming his students in the faith. Well, a couple came to me for marriage preparation who were both alumni of the school. The groom was the son of a family in the parish with whom I had become good friends. I knew they were wonderful Catholic family. I did not know the girl’s family, but it was apparent hers was similar. So they already had an advantage there. But when I brought up the topic of instruction in natural family planning at the first session, as I always did in preparing couples for marriage, they already understood it. Mr. Jacobelli had taught it to them in their high school religion class. They were familiar with it, with the basics of how it works and why it is right, and were looking forward to learning more exactly the mechanics of how to do it. I realized how much easier our work would be if we gave our children and young people good solid formation before they graduate from school.

### **Right Worship**

Formation, though, does not only happen with words. Even more powerfully, it happens through symbol. Early on in my talk I made a passing reference to this by mention of “freewheeling liturgies” becoming “the order of the day.” The most foundational formation of our people happens at worship. You are all familiar with the old maxim: “lex orandi lex credendi.” The importance of right worship cannot be emphasized enough. It is no coincidence

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

that widespread liturgical abuses are occurring as the Church’s moral teachings are being rejected; banal and narcissistic worship produce banal and narcissistic people.

But here, we must begin with ourselves, the priests. We hear a lot about “clericalism” these days; clericalism, in this negative sense, is nothing more than clerical narcissism. We have to admit that this is a very serious and widespread problem in the Church, and it has even infiltrated the sanctuary. I recently had the great pleasure of hosting Cardinal Francis Arinze, the former Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, in San Francisco. In one of the talks he gave, he spoke about liturgical participation. I was happy he made a point that I myself have often emphasized: to celebrate Mass facing the people well, the priest must be very disciplined. When Mass is celebrated facing east, it’s obvious where the focus of the attention is to be. But when celebrated facing the people, even with the intention of trying to engage more active participation from the assembly, unless the priest is very careful he can easily slide into a performance mentality. All the worse when this *is* his intention, that is, to be the focus of attention at Mass. This is unseating God, and the priest putting himself in God’s place. This, though, is really symbolic of what the priest can do with his whole life, for even in these tumultuous times people still generally respect priests, and show them special courtesy. The priest can easily take advantage of this by making himself the center of attention, or carving out for himself a nice, comfortable life by allowing himself to be indulged by the good people of God. God created us to worship Him, and we are who God created to be when we worship *Him*, not each other.

The priest, then, must avoid two extremes, both of which are pitfalls in priestly life he can easily fall into. One is to be an ideologue. Pope Francis has told us bishops that he does not want ideological bishops, he wants pastoral bishops. I would say the same of my priests: I don’t

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

want ideological priests, I want pastoral priests. But I would expand upon that: I also don't want lazy priests – such as those who connive and content themselves with a comfortable life. Those are the two extremes, and neither is authentically human – much less pastoral – and both take the easy way out. The ideologue simply imposes his own ideas on everyone else, regardless of how it will be received and without trying to understand the people who have been entrusted to his pastoral care. The lazy priest, on the other hand, simply lets people do and believe what they want; he avoids conflict at all cost, and builds everything around his personal life, his ministry included.

Notice how both of these avoid genuine human interaction. That is utterly unpastoral. To be pastoral means to be present. That's what love is like: love delights simply in being present to the beloved. A priest cannot possibly hope to help his people grow in holiness if he is not present to them. His loving, pastoral presence to them at those most critical moments of life – the loss of a loved one, the birth of a child, marriage, times of crisis – all of this prepares the ground for him to, when necessary, challenge them for their own ongoing conversion. So make no mistake: truly doing the “pastoral thing” will always be harder, it will always place demands on you, sometimes inconvenient and uncomfortable demands; it will require you to work hard.

This reality is especially true when it comes to the liturgy. It will take a lot of hard work and spiritual stamina to teach your people what the Council, and all of the post-conciliar instructions, have really asked us to do: preservation of Latin in the liturgy as the common liturgical and cultural patrimony of all Catholics; giving Gregorian chant the first place in liturgical services; teaching people to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in the simpler melodies of this chant. And there is so much more to do, especially when it comes to giving adequate preparation to lay people who exercise different ministries at Mass:

*“What a Bishop Can Tell His Priests” (Speech for International Symposium in Schloss Trumau)*

musicians, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion (if you have them), altar servers, and so forth. It is not enough to train them; they must be given formation. And our people in general must be taught how to worship; we need to re-educate them on the importance of silence, of dressing respectfully, of conducting themselves with reverence and dignity at worship. Here again, the bishop cannot tell his priests this unless he has first done it himself. From my own experience as a pastor I know this is possible. It takes a lot of hard work, much patience and perseverance, but progress can be made. And I found that it raises people’s consciousness about the sacred dignity of the liturgy, such that when they attend Mass elsewhere and see how sloppy things are done they notice it, whereas they would have not noticed it before. Again, this is the principle of teaching more powerfully through symbol than with words.

We hear much talk today about “servant leadership.” To have credibility, we have to model that first and foremost at the liturgy: we are the servants of the liturgy, not its creators. This, again, takes a great deal of discipline, restraint and humility on the part of the liturgical ministers, and most especially the celebrant. The Church’s liturgy is a given, not ours to do with as we will. It is our job to celebrate it well and faithfully, not tinker with it for the sake of “creativity” or “self-expression.” That, once again, would be a matter of succumbing to clerical narcissism. I do not know what can be more quintessentially clerical than the priest making himself the center of attention at Mass.

For this vision to be realized at the parish level, practically speaking, the two extremes must be avoided, and the true pastoral approach taken. The ideologue, for example, will simply start mandating changes without talking to people, seeking to understand them, and, most importantly, teaching them. He’s in charge, so he does what he wants, and even if what he wants is what the Church says we should be doing, he alienates people. The lazy priest, on the other

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hand, simply lets things drift off on their own, and get further and further away from what the Church teaches about how we are to worship. This, too, will inevitably begin to affect how and what his people believe, and so weaken their faith. But the pastoral priest will educate his people about what the Church teaches, what the Council really had in mind for authentic liturgical reform; he will begin to introduce changes gradually, especially by targeting one principal Sunday Mass to build it up as the one with special solemnity, and then allow it to influence the way the other Masses are celebrated. He also will not take anything away from his people; he will keep the contemporary music at the other Masses, and teach the musicians how to do it well. In this way, he will facilitate liturgical renewal organically. And it can be done. I’ve seen it done. I know pastors who inherited a parish in shambles (in one of them, a children’s swing set was in the pastor’s back yard!), and, by approaching it precisely this way, they have completely transformed their parishes: the Masses are full, there are long lines for confessions, the full spectrum of ministries abound – including the teaching of Natural Family Planning – and people are on fire for their faith.

## **Conclusion**

Of course, for the priest to take the pastoral approach, he must *be* pastoral. That is, he must have acquired the virtues necessary to be so: humility, chastity, generosity, courage, gentleness, compassion, wisdom, and so forth. So, as I come to the conclusion of my reflections, I would say that the most important thing that a bishop can tell his priests is to encourage them to attend to their own personal formation: a life of prayer, especially being faithful to praying the Liturgy of the Hours; daily rosary; making a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament every day; observance of penitential practices and especially fasting on Fridays, which is still a day of

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penance in Church practice and law; availing themselves frequently of the sacrament of Penance; continuing to grow in learning and understanding by studying, reading, and attending worthwhile conferences and symposia on topics affecting Church life and ministry (such as this one!).

Such a priest will then be able to do what needs to be done for the renewal of the Church and proclamation of the Gospel as I have outlined here, by being a minister of word and sacrament: forming his people in faith and virtue through sound preaching and teaching, and promoting and celebrating reverent and beautiful liturgies. As our Lord tells us in the Gospel, the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. There is a great catch waiting out there; there is an abundance of goodwill. As I visit the parishes, I see that our people love their priests and their parish, they love the Church. They will respond well to a pastor who truly cares for them and moves them along the path of holiness by all the means at his disposal, as appropriate to the occasion: persuasion, admonition, encouragement, solidarity, but, above all, personal example. May the time we have spent here help us to be such ministers for God’s people.