

“... Live a Life Worthy of the Calling You Have Received...”



A Pastoral Letter
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Preface

The pandemic of 2020 has proved to be an unprecedented event in the lives of most of us as citizens and especially as Catholics. For the vast majority of us who were not alive during the Spanish flu outbreak of the early twentieth century, this pandemic's impact on our daily lives has been significant. For us who are Catholics the pandemic's impact altered how we were able to practice our faith, at least temporarily, and it has revealed just how much many Catholics do not know of their own faith and Church.

However, by God's abundant grace the pandemic has given us a wonderful opportunity to increase our faith, hope and charity as well as our understanding of the faith we profess, why we profess what we believe and how and why we practice what we profess to believe. This is what moves me, your Bishop, to write this Pastoral Letter to you, the Christian faithful of the Diocese of Bismarck, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

The example of solid and fervent faith and hope displayed by so many of you during the time when there were no public liturgies, and then when we resumed public worship under definite restrictions has been a true joy for me and a source of great hope for our Church. However, what I experienced from many who communicated with me during the pandemic also revealed that many Catholics have wrong notions of what the Church teaches concerning the seven sacraments, its sacred liturgies and rites and what it teaches are the obligations of those who are Catholics. There is serious confusion among many about the faith but more so about how our faith should be lived daily under the guidance of our Church.

As your Bishop and the chief shepherd of the Diocese of Bismarck, it is my privilege to teach you about our Catholic faith and ask you to renew yourselves in it so that you will be stronger, and you will be better able to assist me to continue to proclaim the Good News of salvation. This is the first fruit of our vocation to holiness, and it is the work of our Baptism; in word and action we are to be the intentional disciples of Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen for the salvation of the world.

We cannot do this if we do not know Him, His Church, and the faith which is His gift to each of us.

Laudetur, Jesus Christus! May Jesus Christ be praised!

+David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

Solemnity of Pentecost
23 May 2021

Introduction

Pastoral Letters written by bishops are similar to the Apostolic Letters written by popes. Sometimes Pastoral Letters are more general in scope and other times they are more specific, directed to a particular Church doctrine and practice or to a specific moral-social issue. Ultimately, most Pastoral Letters are a combination of the general and the specific teachings of the Church applied to daily Catholic life as it is to be lived in and through the specific vocations of Catholics.

The constant in all Pastoral Letters is the Person of Jesus Christ and His life and teaching; Pastoral Letters help the Catholic to understand this and to conform one's daily life to Christ's life. It is in doing this that the example given is so powerful. We believe and know to be true that it is through just such an example that Christ touches the heart and mind of another. This is the nature of one's real conversion to Christ. The glorious martyrdom of Stephen witnessed by the young man Saul began his conversion from Saul to Paul which culminated in his Damascus Road experience of Jesus (Acts 7: 58; 9: 3-6). We know what this single conversion to Christ meant for the world.

A few questions are in order. For whom is this Pastoral Letter written? What is the content of this Pastoral Letter? How is this Pastoral Letter structured and how should it be read?

I write this Pastoral Letter for all of the Christian faithful of the Diocese of Bismarck, for our devoted Clergy (bishop, priests and deacons), for our Consecrated Religious (men and women), for our faithful Catholic laity (adults, youth and children), and for the society and culture in which we live. The content of this Pastoral Letter in a word is Catholic teaching and practice as it pertains to us all and to specific vocations. This Pastoral Letter is structured around specific questions Jesus asks of others as they are recorded in the Four Gospels and how the Church in the persons of the Apostles understood and applied to Catholic life the answers to these questions as we find them recorded in the New Testament Epistles.

This Pastoral Letter should be read by having at hand two essential documents: Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We cannot know Christ, His Church and our faith without reading and understanding these two primary and necessary sources.

There are five parts to this Pastoral Letter along with a section for notes and a final section for a few appendices which are meant to help the reader delve further into our Catholic faith and deepen our living of it.

I would suggest that you read this Pastoral Letter in sections or parts and not all at once. Begin with a prayer to God the Holy Spirit for an infusion of His seven gifts we received first in Baptism and then in Confirmation. As you read ask yourself how this applies to you and what has been its impact on your life and how must you improve at converting and conforming your life to the life of Jesus.

Laudetur Jesus Christus! May Jesus Christ be praised!

Part One: To the Catholic Faithful in General

“Of His fullness we have all had a share – grace following upon grace.” (Jn 1: 16)

This magnificent exclamation and profession of faith is found in the Prologue of Saint John’s Gospel, the Fourth Gospel. The fullness of Christ is His very life and that life for us is the gift of grace, a share in the divine life, in which we were immersed at the moment of our Baptism. We were cleansed of original sin, incorporated into the Body of Christ, His Church, and we received the grace of faith which is to be our means to achieve heaven.

The Church has always understood that in and through Baptism, the first sacrament, we receive from the mercy of Almighty God our first and life-long vocation which is the vocation to holiness of life. It is God Who created us in His own image and likeness and thus, our inherent dignity as persons, our human dignity is fulfilled in this vocation to holiness (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1700). Since we receive this vocation at Baptism it is based on our faith in and our identification with Jesus and thus, this first vocation which we have been given forms the foundation for the particular vocation each of us is offered by God in our lives. How we accept and fulfill this particular vocation will depend on how well we accept and fulfill our first vocation to holiness of life.

What we believe and know to be true is this fact of the life of grace – that our vocation to holiness received in Baptism is the beginning of a life in this world which will be most fulfilling or most unhappy depending on whether we use God’s grace to cultivate virtue and holiness or we refuse or neglect God’s grace. St. Paul gives us the Church’s understanding of Baptism and why it is essential for our lives. “All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Him.” (Gal 3: 27)

Because St. Paul explains this in clear terms, it follows that if we have been “clothed with Jesus” we must then come to know, love and serve Him in our lives. This is possible if we dedicate ourselves to knowing our faith and knowing how and why we practice our

faith, and always looking to the Church for guidance when we have questions. Again, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is essential reading and study for every Catholic and not just the clergy and religious.

The source of God's grace is His Church and the seven sacraments Jesus instituted and then entrusted to the Church to minister generously to God's people for their salvation and that of the world. We have known this since we began to learn our faith by the example and then teaching of our parents and others. This knowledge was deepened as we were prepared to receive the other sacraments of initiation (Holy Eucharist and Confirmation), the sacraments of healing (Penance and Anointing of the Sick), and the sacraments at the service of communion (Matrimony and Holy Orders). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has a beautiful description of each of the seven sacraments in Part Two, Section Two. I urge you to read this section prayerfully.

When we consider the seven sacraments it is easy enough to grasp how much the Lord loves us since they span our entire earthly lives from conception to natural death. He does not want us to be without His life, His grace at any moment.

At the very beginning of His public ministry and as St. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, He was followed by two of John's disciples. Jesus asks them a question which He asks each of us so often. His questions are always directed to us so that we realize that He knows us, He wants to be with us, and He wants us to have a personal relationship with Him.

“. . .He asked them, 'What are you looking for?' . . . 'Rabbi, where do You live? Come and see.'" (Jn 1: 38-39) If we are sincere about fostering our first vocation to holiness, soon enough we all begin to realize that the Lord is asking us this question. In other words, as we get to a certain age, we begin to wonder what we are to do in life and Jesus asks us through other persons or events "What are you looking for?"

This is the beginning of His offer to us of that particular vocation for our lives in which we are to continue to be holy by

doing His will. In a way each of us will recognize and know, He says to you, to me, to every person, “Come and see”. When we obey His call, it becomes clearer to us that He is calling some to the married life in which they are to cultivate holiness for one another and cooperate with Him in the creation of new life. To others it becomes clearer that He is calling some to the sacred priesthood so that He can continue to teach and to sanctify and to shepherd His people in His Church. To others it becomes clearer that He is calling some to the consecrated life so that He can continue to show the world the blessing of a life lived totally for Him and His Church in evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience. To others it becomes clearer that He is calling them to live in the world but not be of the world as a devout and chaste single person as a sign of the abiding and powerful effect His grace has and how it produces good fruits of love for God and others in works of corporal and spiritual mercy.

When we experience the Lord’s call to us to “Come and see” and then to follow Him in the specific vocation He offers us, remember, this begins at Baptism and does not end until we die. In a word, this is the direct connection between professing our faith and living our faith. Again, St. Paul gives us the Church’s understanding of our individual vocations. “I plead with you, then, as a prisoner for the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly.” (Eph 4: 1-2)

From the time of the Apostles to the present day, the Church has never wavered in its faith and teaching that our first vocation to holiness is perfected by our fidelity to the particular vocation the Lord has given each of us, and these two vocations are given to us in and through His Church. “In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired: ‘Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state – though each in his own way – are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.’” (CCC, 825)

No matter what our particular vocation may be, every single Catholic is to live it unconditionally because it comes from God to

us as a visible sign of His love and mercy as well as the real sign of how we are to live our faith and ultimately save our souls. So, whether one is married, single, consecrated religious or cleric, we all have the means to be faithful to God and the Church in our vocations. We all have the sacraments, our sacred liturgies, the approved devotions to foster and strengthen our personal and communal lives of faith, and the true and definite teachings of our Church which help us make the good and right decisions we must make every day in order to be holy.

The Church teaches all of us: “Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are sacraments of Christian initiation. They ground the common vocation of all Christ’s disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world. They confer the graces needed for the life according to the Spirit during this life as pilgrims on the march towards the homeland.” (CCC, 1533)

Again, Our Lord’s question should resound in our minds and hearts: “What are you looking for?” (Jn 1: 38) As I mentioned, the pandemic has surfaced a noticeable lack of knowledge and understanding of the faith and our Church among many Catholics. What has become apparent to me is that many go to the internet and various websites for information and then treat the information as if it is the definitive word on a Catholic issue. Let me assure all, it is not and more often the information is misleading because it is incomplete or wrong or just opinion. This is alarming because of the ready accessibility and use of the internet which is creating something of an artificial catholicism with a small “c”. I find that just like the phenomenon of “cafeteria catholicism” so we now have a mutated version of it with “internet catholicism”.

What are we the clergy, the consecrated religious men and women, and the faithful laity to do? It seems that the prudent course would be to return to the sure, certain and reliable sources of our faith, namely, Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition as embodied in the definitive teachings of the Church, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. By return I mean that all of us need to read prayerfully the Scriptures in the way St. Peter teaches us, since it is God, Himself speaking. “First you must understand

this: there is no prophecy contained in Scripture which is a personal interpretation. Prophecy has never been put forward by man's willing it. It is rather that men impelled by the Holy Spirit have spoken under God's influence." (2 Peter 2: 20-21) St. Paul exhorts Timothy about the value of Scripture. "All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3: 16-17)

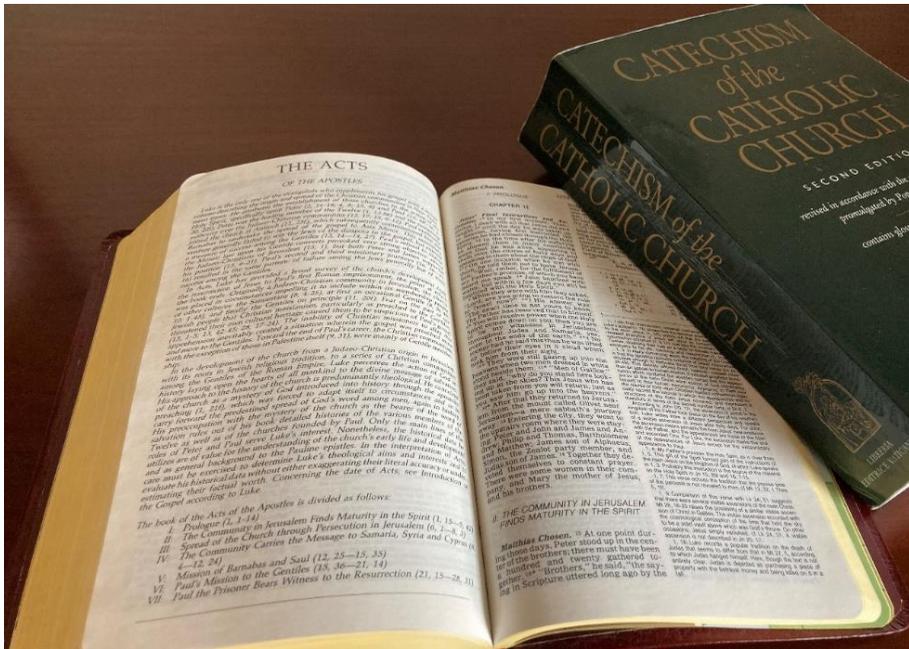
Of equal importance for all of us is to realize anew that with the inspired Sacred Scriptures, Holy Tradition is the very means by which the Church remains faithful to Christ in every age in its fearless preaching of the Gospel in its entirety. The Church teaches: "*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching." (CCC, 81)

To summarize this first part, all of us without exception have been called by Jesus in Baptism to be holy in our daily lives; all of us without exception have been called by Jesus to be holy in a specific vocation that He asks us to come and receive from Him in order to save our souls and serve His Church; and all of us without exception have been given His grace in the sacraments which He instituted so that we can follow Him faithfully and answer in word and action His question: "And you, He said to them, Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16: 15)

The Church teaches: "In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function'." (CCC, 872)

None of us can do this if we are not willing to know Him, to know His Church and to know and live our faith in the vocation with which He has blessed us all for the honor and glory of God.

Even though we possess different vocations, His question has the same penetrating and compelling force for each of us. St. Paul helps us to know and understand how in our vocations we can do this faithfully. “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.” (Rom 12: 2)



Part Two: To the Clergy and Religious

It is the constant teaching of the Church based on its Apostolic faith and Tradition, that the Lord Christ chooses from among His faithful certain men to be His bishops, priests and deacons and places them at the head of the community of the faithful to be their servants. They are to be the ministers of His mysteries, the sacraments, and to be the guardians of the dignity of His sacraments, all for the salvation of souls. (CCC, 879, 1534, 1536)

Thus, the question Jesus asks has a very particular application to clerics: “And you, He said to them, Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16: 15) Why is this so? Precisely because it is Jesus Who tells His Apostles and us: “It was not you who chose Me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.” (Jn 15: 16) Every ordained bishop, priest and deacon knows this about his vocation and, knowing this, freely accepts all the responsibilities inherent to his vocation and office in the Church.

To fulfill these responsibilities of our vocation we, the clergy, must deepen our spiritual life of prayer and meditation; we must continue to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the faith by regular study; we must continue to dedicate ourselves to the pastoral ministry by exercising it according to the mind of the Church and at the direction of the Church. Not to do all of this is to not use the grace of Baptism and the grace of Holy Orders. This will be bad for the cleric and for the Church.

If we, the clergy, dedicate ourselves to doing this daily then when Jesus asks us “Who do you say that I am?” like Peter answering for all we too say without hesitation, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16: 16) As for Peter and the other Apostles, so it is for every cleric, the rest of our lives are to be spent putting into practice that faith with which Peter spoke and which we spoke when we said *ad sum* to His call to ordination.

How did the Twelve do this and hand it on to every succeeding generation of clergy? St. Paul offers the answer which the Church has always urged upon us as the chosen shepherds of God's people. "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, Who inspires and perfects our faith." (Heb 12: 2). Like the Twelve and all who have gone before us in Holy Orders, we must know and understand that it is Jesus Crucified and Risen Whom we preach to others because redemption is all about Him. It is Jesus Crucified and Risen Whom we minister to others in and through the seven sacraments because they are His means of giving to others and to us His life of grace. It is Jesus Crucified and Risen Whom we serve as the chosen shepherds for His people so that He, the Good Shepherd, directs, guides, teaches and corrects His people when they go astray. (CCC, 1551)

All of this is the result of the Church's constant meditation on and its renewal in the light of what Jesus did at the Last Supper to and for His Apostles. Having knelt before each of them He washed their feet and then asked: "Do you know what I have done to you?" (Jn 13:12ff) My brother priests and deacons, our ministry will bear that fruit for which the Lord has chosen us only if we understand why Jesus asked the Twelve this question, because He asks the same of us. We all have been chosen and ordained to our order in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ for service of Almighty God and His people at the altar of Sacrifice, at the service of the Word and in service to Him Whom we see and find in the poor and the sick and the dispossessed. This is how the Apostles, and their successors understood the question, and this is how you and I must understand and respond to the same question. There is no other way than the example of Jesus which the grace of Holy Orders gives us the power to imitate.

This Christ-like service is expressed by the Church and lived by the Church just as St. Paul said: "Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you." (Col 3: 12-13)

The sacramental ministry of the bishop, his priests and his deacons is meant to be a unifying ministry in the same way that Jesus in His earthly life was united to the Father in doing the Father's will, in the same way that the Apostles were united to Jesus before and after His Resurrection in doing His will, and in the same way we are united to each other as the priests are the co-workers with the bishop and the deacons have that special attachment to the bishop in the tasks of their ordained service. (CCC, 1567, 1569) Again, the words of St. Paul noted above take on a special force and urgency for the clergy. To be able to fulfill our vocations for God and the Church we must have a unity and fraternity among ourselves that is Christ-like in its charity and animated by the Holy Spirit.

This is so since, like in every prior age of the Church so in our times, fidelity to Christ and the Gospel will entail sufferings and it is this unity among the clergy which has its source in the unity of the Most Blessed Trinity that helps us to persevere with a joyful faith and hope. At times we fail or have doubts about our ability to persevere in certain circumstances and it is then that Jesus reminds every bishop, priest and deacon that He is with us and in fact He carries us. "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" (Mt 8: 26; 14: 31)

The reason the Church in its doctrine on the Sacrament of Holy Orders is clear about the nature and purpose and responsibilities of bishops, priests and deacons is the result of the teaching and practice of the Apostles as expressed by St. Paul and St. Peter. "Conduct yourselves, then, in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ . . . Do not be intimidated by your opponents in any situation." (Phil 1: 27-28; cf. 1 Peter 4: 12-13)

A bishop possesses in its fullness the three-fold office of Christ the High Priest to teach, to sanctify and to govern His people and the priests have a direct share in this office by ordination. (CCC, 1558, 1564) Deacons are ordained to help and serve the bishop and his priests and together all of us are to be at the service of God and His Church. This is a great joy and privilege which will always be opposed by the world and even by some within the Church. That is why it is so necessary for the clergy to have a

strong spiritual life, a solid education in the faith with a robust and substantial continuing education, and a consistent pastoral ministry which seeks out and serves all in need in the name and in the person of Jesus Christ.

If we do this with humility and in obedience to Christ and the Church then we, like James and John can answer the question Jesus put to them: “Are you able to drink the chalice that I am to drink?” (Mt 20: 22)

Almost all that has been said to this point regarding the clergy can be said with equal applicability to consecrated religious men and women. Nevertheless, the state in life of the consecrated man and woman has its own distinct and necessary place within the Church, the Body of Christ. “The state of life which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not entering into the hierarchical structure of the Church, belongs undeniably to her life and holiness’.” (CCC, 914; cf. 873)

The consecrated life has held a prominent place in the history and the life of the Church from Apostolic times to the present. We read in the New Testament writings of some of the Lord’s disciples who followed him faithfully as single men and women. In the earliest days it was noted that women from an early age consecrated themselves to the Lord as virgins and not even the threat of torture and death could dissuade them from their total love of Him. Both men and women gave up lives of comfort and influence to go to the desert to live a life of prayer, penance and communion with the Lord and their examples drew countless others to do the same. All of this was done so that the person could conform his or her life as closely as possible to the life of Jesus. I urge all and especially our consecrated men and women to read again the section on the consecrated life in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in paragraphs 914-933.

This understanding of the consecrated life has not changed. In fact, the Church canonized this life and describes it this way: “Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated

life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience. It is the *profession* of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God.” (CCC, 915)

Clearly, the consecrated life in its rich and varied forms has been a necessary part of the Church and continues to be so. No matter the age of the Church consecrated life has consistently sustained the Church in its members who seek that perfection of charity as a service of the Kingdom of God. Not only this but it is the special charism of consecrated religious men and women “to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.” (CCC, 916)

In practical terms how does the Church expect consecrated religious to do this? Two documents of the Church’s more recent Magisterium come immediately to mind and I am hopeful that all religious have read them and read them more than once – *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Vita Consecrata* – the former a document of the Second Vatican Council and the latter an encyclical authored by Pope St. John Paul II. While addressing consecrated life in its various approved forms, both point to certain elements all have in common. These elements endure and flourish in every age of the Church no matter the external circumstances and, if lived faithfully, always keep consecrated life strong for the building up of the Church and for the sanctification of the wider culture.

What are these elements which all forms of consecrated life have in common? First, all have a certain charism approved of by the Church since it is to contribute to the building up of the Church and the fostering of the Catholic faith. This charism can take different forms: it can be an active charism such as teaching or health care or a special service; it can be a contemplative charism such as living the cloistered life of prayer and penance or a life of perpetual adoration for the salvation of souls. Whatever the charism may be, it is the Church’s formal recognition and approval which gives this religious institute its standing within the Body of Christ and which makes it attractive for men and women to enter and live the consecrated life.

Second, whatever the charism may be as approved by the Church, it is lived by the members in and through their professing and living of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in some kind of community. Every form of the consecrated life approved by the Church has this element of a common life, even if solitude is at the heart of its charism. There will always be times when members are together for prayer, study and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

What all men and women living a form of the consecrated life must know and understand and then make a part of their daily lives is this fundamental fact – their life emanates from the very heart and mystery of the Church itself. Therefore, the consecrated life cannot exist apart from the Church. The Church is the foundation for its very existence and from the Church consecrated life receives its mission in the world. The Church teaches this truth when it states: “It is a gift she has received from her Lord, a gift she offers as a stable way of life to the faithful called by God to profess the counsels. Thus, the Church can both show forth Christ and acknowledge herself to be the Savior’s bride. Religious life in its various forms is called to signify the very charity of God in the language of our time.” (CCC, 926)

It follows as equally true that the profession and living of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience are both personal to the man or woman and communal since they are lived within and for the Church and to serve its God-given mission in the world. Anything which would alter or contradict the nature and purpose of this life and thus make it incompatible with the Church and its mission must never be done; it is not a true consecrated life. This is why the Church has the final say over any changes or modifications a particular religious institute wishes to make. As with every legitimate vocation so it is to be with the consecrated life – its faithful and fruitful living is such, only if it is an imitation of the poverty, chastity and obedience of Jesus. This type of example is necessary for the entire Church and for the greater society and culture.

The Church says this: “To follow and imitate Christ more nearly and to manifest more clearly his self-emptying is to be more

deeply present to one's contemporaries, in the heart of Christ. For those who are on this 'narrower' path encourage their brethren by their example, and bear striking witness 'that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes.'" (CCC, 932)

Having discussed the need for and the distinct vocations of the clergy and the religious in the Church, as well as what both clergy and religious must do to be faithful to their vocations in order to build up the Church, foster the one true faith, and visibly serve God in the world, let us again summarize this part of the Pastoral Letter. Two statements of the Church give us an excellent teaching.

"Helped by the priests, their co-workers, and by the deacons, the bishops have the duty of authentically teaching the faith, celebrating divine worship, above all the Eucharist, and guiding their Churches as true pastors. Their responsibility also includes concern for all the Churches, with and under the Pope." (CCC, 939)

"The life consecrated to God is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. Already destined for him through Baptism, the person who surrenders himself to the God he loves above all else thereby consecrates himself more intimately to God's service and to the good of the whole Church." (CCC, 944-945)

Such is the sacred priesthood and the consecrated life that it is imperative for every bishop, priest and deacon, every consecrated man and woman religious to foster and strengthen their vocations by sincere prayer, unfeigned works of corporal and spiritual mercy to others, and humble acts of penance and self-mortification. All of this requires regular and sound study of Church doctrine and discipline so that the example given is the imitation of Christ and not self-glorification or self-promotion.

Part Three: To the Lay Faithful

If you have accompanied me so far in this Pastoral Letter, you will know that everything said in Part One pertains to and includes you my dear people. Whether you be married, single, widowed, a child, youth, young adult or older person, you have a wonderful vocation received in Baptism and sealed by God the Holy Spirit in Confirmation to be holy, to be a saint. Moreover, you know that to be true to your vocation to holiness, you need God's grace received in and through His Church in the sacraments, in our devotions, in the authoritative teachings of His Church, and by keeping yourselves joined to Him in His Church by that obedience of faith which every saint and holy person has left you as an example to follow. Read what Jesus tells His disciples about Him being the vine and they the branches and then understand your dignity, your vocation and your duty as Catholics. (Jn 15: 5-8)

Recall that clear and penetrating question Jesus puts to His disciples. "And you, He said to them, Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16: 15) I repeat that this question is asked by Jesus of all of you and it requires an answer that is better given by your actions than by just saying the correct words. To be able to respond to Jesus you need to be formed by Jesus just as His Apostles and first disciples were formed by Him. You need to be with Him in your prayer life, you need to listen to Him by your study and meditation on Sacred Scripture, you need to listen to Him when His Church guides you in moral and social matters, and you need to follow Him in your good works so that those whom you serve recognize Jesus through you.

At first glance you may think this is a daunting if not impossible task; it is not, precisely because He has given you the gifts of Baptism and Confirmation in which you have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus has given you Himself in the Holy Eucharist to enlighten and fortify your life with and in Him. (CCC, 900) Again, the Church from ancient times understood this as a distinctive trait of the faithful Christian. St. Paul says: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect." (Rom 12: 2) St. Paul elaborated

on this truth in the same Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans in verses 9-21 which I urge you to read carefully.

Let us take a careful look at the distinct and indispensable role the Catholic laity have in the life and mission of the Church and in the world. This role is not merely an extension of that of the clergy and religious, it is just as distinct but related and, in fact, it is a role that is proper to Catholic lay men and women.

Citing the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Church explains the crucial role of the laity this way. “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will . . . It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.” (CCC, 898)

Reading this teaching one might be tempted to think that this is true but does not apply since he or she is not a professional person or a politician or a public celebrity but is an ordinary husband or wife or single person, a youth or young adult who does not have any special talent or role to fulfill. Nothing could be further from the truth as far as the Church is concerned. The Church is very clear that the laity, by reason of Baptism, have a real and necessary participation in the three-fold office of Jesus to teach, to sanctify and to shepherd. The laity’s participation is different from that of the clergy and consecrated religious, but it is no less a real participation to which they have a right and a duty to accept and fulfill for the Church and for the world.

St. Matthew narrates a moment in Our Lord’s public life when he is teaching a very large crowd and His Mother and brethren approach and try to see Him. Someone tells Jesus that they wish to see Him. Recall what Jesus says. “Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren?” (Mt 12: 48ff) Jesus answers His own question and my dear brothers and sisters He speaks about you. He said that whoever does the will of His heavenly Father is His mother and brother and sister.

The question Jesus asked His disciples and the large crowd following Him gives you the solid foundation for your life of faith in every circumstance. Jesus said: “What profit does a man show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process? What can a man offer in exchange for his life?” (Mk 8: 36-37) To hear the word of God and keep it, to live it, is your true profit and gain because it builds you up in this life and does not destroy you. It transforms your earthly life into an imitation of Christ’s earthly life and prepares you for heaven. This is your real life to live in and for the Church and to make visible to a world which seems to have rejected the Light.

The Catholic lay faithful participate in the sanctifying office of Jesus primarily by the holiness of their daily lives, animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the worthy reception of the sacraments, their good works of charity, their daily prayers, and faithfulness to their families and friends, all as an act of spiritual and temporal sacrifice in imitation of Jesus. You are hearing the Lord in your life and doing what He tells you. St. James gives you the Church’s understanding of your vocation: “My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, does it?” (Jas 2: 14) The Church says: “And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives.” (CCC, 901)

The Catholic lay faithful participate in the teaching office of Jesus again primarily by the good example they give to others and by how they explain clearly and defend our faith and the Church to those who are ignorant of them or have a hatred for them. Also, the laity can collaborate in the Church’s catechetical apostolate, in teaching the sacred subjects and in the use of the media to evangelize others according to the mind and direction of the Church. (CCC, 904-906) St. Paul captures the Church’s understanding of the lay faithful’s participation in all three offices of Jesus when he says: “Remember that you have been called to live in freedom – but not a freedom that gives free rein to the flesh. Out of love place yourselves at one another’s service.” (Gal 5: 13)

The Catholic lay faithful participate in the shepherding or governing office of Jesus both in the world and in the Church. In the current times you know full well that our society and its legitimate values are under attack by a savage form of secularism which not only tries to marginalize God and truth but actually is trying to eradicate them. The Church teaches that your right and duty to face this is essential. “Moreover, by uniting their forces let the laity so remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that these may be conformed to the norms of justice, favoring rather than hindering the practice of virtue. By so doing they will impregnate culture and human works with a moral value.” (CCC, 909)

Your participation in the governing office of Jesus in the Church is real and very much needed. When Jesus confronts the Jewish authorities and poses a question, St. Luke notes that they knew the answer but would not give it to Him. Jesus asked: “I ask you, is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” (Lk 6: 9) The point that Jesus makes is that religion and its institution are to be at the service of man and not the other way around. The Church has always understood this and expresses it this way. “The laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them.” (CCC, 910) Some of the ways you faithful men and women can and do assist the pastors is in the celebration of the Church’s liturgies, in the teaching of the faith to our children and youth, in taking the lead in extending the Church’s charity to the poor and in assisting the pastors and bishop in the necessary administrative duties of our parishes and the Diocese.

So, your distinct and needed participation in the three-fold office of Jesus to teach, to sanctify and to govern is real. Because this is so, I know you will understand when I say that you have a two-fold obligation to offer to assist and to be educated in that for which you are offering. This obligation is serious, and it requires an equally serious preparation so that the Church’s mission is served effectively and fruitfully for the spread of the Gospel.

Clearly, you cannot do everything, and the Church does not expect you to do so; but all of you can do something and do it well. To be an active and informed Catholic requires effort and this effort begins with prayer seeking the Lord's help. Recall in the Gospel how Jesus saw two blind men at Jericho and addressed their plea. "Jesus then stopped and called out to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'" (Mt 20:32) Jesus asks you the same question and like the blind men He wants you to tell Him what you want. As faithful lay men and women ask Him to give you the grace to fulfill your vocations to the best of your abilities because in doing so you serve the Lord and His Church and its mission in the world.

St. Paul urges the Corinthians to dedicate themselves totally to their faith and its demand for charity as their way of life in Christ, since Jesus gave Himself totally for them and for you. St. Paul said: "He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully." (2 Cor 9: 6-7)

The Church understands what this means for its lay faithful and why it is so important for you to know and understand your faith and its daily living. The Church teaches: "The faithful should 'distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the human society. They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God's dominion.'" (CCC, 912)

To summarize what I have said about your essential place in the life of the Church three things stand out. First, your baptismal vocation to holiness of life which you are to foster in the specific vocation God gives you requires your faith and your action. St. John exhorts the Christian community ". . . let us love in deed and in truth and not merely talk about it." (1 Jn 3: 18) Second, to do what St. John says means that you have a duty to know your faith and the will to make your faith your life and not be afraid to live your faith. Third, to do this you need to accept the teaching and

the guidance of our Church so that what you say and do is a faithful witness to the Truth of the Gospel.

Before anything else it is your faith and trust in God's merciful will that sustains all of you and, as St. Paul says it so well: "We walk by faith, not by sight." (2 Cor 5: 7) In the end it is your firm faith and hope, the anchor of your life that is your identity and dignity. "Thus, every person, through these gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself 'according to the measure of Christ's bestowal.'" (CCC, 913)



Part Four: To the Culture and Society

It is the firm and unchangeable faith of the Church that the Lord Jesus, Crucified and Risen redeemed every person in human history, past, present and future. It is the firm and unchangeable faith of the Church that Jesus founded His Church, the one true Church, to preach this Good News, the Gospel of Truth, in every age of human history and to baptize all who believe, in the Name of the Most Blessed Trinity. It is the firm and unchangeable faith of the Church that Jesus instituted the seven sacraments for the Church and the world in every age as the reliable means of salvation.

It is a historic fact that from Apostolic times to the present, while the Church lives within societies and various cultures, the same cultures and societies have not always been the friend of the Church. When you read a good and unbiased history it becomes clear that the reason for this enmity is that cultures and societies have a difficult time accepting objective truth and the Catholic Church has been and is the preacher and teacher of objective truth. Societal issues and cultural customs may change from age to age, but the truth does not change and in reality, the truth stands as the conscience for every society and culture. Thus, the Catholic Church has been and continues to be persecuted in many different ways for the sake of its fidelity to the truth.

The age-old persecution of the Church has been overt with arrests, gruesome tortures, executions and exiles; it has been covert by the use of discriminations of the legal, social and political kind, all for the same purpose. If the Catholic Church can be silenced, then every kind of immorality and inversion can be imposed as a good and anything that even smacks of objective truth and virtue can be rejected as an evil. However, this cannot and will not happen precisely because the Catholic Church is divine in its origin, life and mission and we have the absolute assurance of Jesus Christ that we have nothing to fear since He has overcome the world and He will remain with us until the end of time. (Jn 16: 33; Mt 28: 20)

Recall Saint Luke's narration of the temptations of Jesus in the desert by Satan. He wrote something that would be a shadow on the public life of Jesus and would certainly continue to be such on the life of His Body, the Church, from Pentecost to the present. After Jesus had rejected Satan and his temptations for the third time, it is said: "When the devil had finished all the tempting, he left Him, to await another opportunity." (Lk 4: 13) Satan did not wait until the Agony in the Garden to return to tempt Jesus, he worked through all those who opposed Jesus throughout His public life, both Jews and pagans. All four Gospels are replete with accounts of Jesus being hated, accused of so-called crimes against the Law of Moses and the state, and plots to kill Him. This is the clear work of Satan and in every case he failed. The Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection are the real and historic proof of this failure.

However, the four Gospels also recount the many times Jesus not only spoke of His own persecution and death, but they also narrate the times He told His Apostles and disciples that they too could expect to suffer and be persecuted because of Him and their fidelity to Him. The best source for how this happened to them is the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles. Satan was still at work but as before, he was overcome by the power of the Apostolic faith animated and fostered by the Holy Spirit. In the Epistle of Saint Jude, we find a wonderful expression of how to defeat the world and Satan. "But you, beloved, grow strong in your holy faith through prayer in the Holy Spirit. Persevere in God's love and welcome the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ which leads to life eternal. Correct those who are confused; the others you must rescue, snatching them from the fire. Even those you pity be on your guard." (Jude 20-23)

Thus, the visible state of our current society and culture should shock and repulse us for its utter depravity, but we should not be surprised. Satan is still at work "prowling about seeking the ruin of souls", and he continues to do so just as he did to Jesus and just as he has done to His Church in every age. It is for us who are His Catholic faithful to face and reject Satan and his works and empty promises today as all before us have done and have left us an example to follow.

What we observe and experience in our secular society and culture so often is not good and cannot be reconciled with the truth of Gospel or even right human reason. I will list just some of the serious errors and defects which seem to be advancing upon us but the root cause for all of them is a willful and intentional rejection of God and His will for humanity. This is called “secular humanism” and it is at the heart of every evil totalitarian political system, it is at the heart of political correctness, and it is the basis for moral relativism and social entitlement, none of which serve the common good but destroy the common good.

Saint Matthew and Saint Luke record for us the gripping question and answer Jesus asks of His own times and generation. “But to what shall I compare this generation?” (Mt 11: 16ff) “To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like?” (Lk 7: 31ff) Read the answer Jesus gives as it is clear and applicable to the people of His day, but it is equally applicable to our own times and to so many people. Using John the Baptist and Himself as examples, Jesus describes people as spoiled children who are selfish, petty and capricious. How accurately this describes our own times, and we cannot exclude ourselves from this characterization.

St. Paul gives the Church’s understanding of the Lord’s question and answer. He wrote: “For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth and will wander off to fables.” (2 Tim: 3: 3-4) We are living in just such times. Objective truth is shunned like the plague in favor of the lie that we determine what is good and normative for us and that is our truth no matter the consequences, a direct result of adopting secular humanism. This is not a philosophy as much as it is an ideology based on the falsehood that man is supreme and not God.

As I mentioned earlier, I will list some of the more glaring secular social and cultural errors being promoted and imposed as truth when, in fact, they are all lies meant to undermine the real common good and substitute for it the “dictatorship of relativism”.

Let me say at the outset that each of these errors is grievously sinful. The first error is the most glaring error, that is, abortion. This is not a Catholic issue in and of itself, but it is a human rights issue that it seems only the Catholic Church understands and resists. The second error is any and all means of artificial contraception. These means directly and intentionally frustrate the plan of God, the Author of all life human and divine, for the human race. These means separate what no human is qualified to do, that is, the unitive and procreative aspects of marriage. These means objectify the spouses in an essential way which leads them to use each other and not respect and love each other as they are loved by God.

The third error is the idea that human beings can redefine what they did not create and is not theirs to manipulate, that is, the reality of a true marriage between one man and one woman for as long as they live. This defies all human reason and no government or group or circumstance can change the reality of what a real and true marriage is. A fourth and related error is the fact of civil divorce. The culture has made this into a good and a right and, of course, divorce is neither. It is a human intervention in what humans did not create.

A fifth error is the promotion of the false notion that a person can and has the right to decide his or her gender and not to accept the gender of one's birth. Again, this defies all right reason but more to the point, it is a pathological delusion which needs to be addressed with serious therapy, not by subverting the objective truth and the scientific fact of one's physical gender.

I could continue to list more of these social and cultural errors being promoted as goods and absolute rights but that is not my intention. These will suffice as examples and in each case the Catholic Church continues to teach the truth of the Gospel in addressing these errors. While every Catholic is to be involved in what the Church does it falls in a particular way to the Catholic lay faithful to take the lead in our society and culture in these matters. This is what the Church teaches: "The faithful should 'distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members

of the human society. They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God's dominion'." (CCC, 912)

As I had mentioned we should not exclude ourselves from how Jesus described the people of His generation. It seems to me that some Catholics, contrary to what their own Church teaches with the authority of Christ regarding faith and morals, feel qualified to reject all or parts of that teaching, feel qualified to sit in judgment of the Pope and bishops, as well as their fellow Catholics if what they think and what they want are not agreed with and are not given to them. This attitude has infected our society and the Church and again, it is the not too subtle work of Satan. While it can be fatal for society it will not destroy the Church, but it can destroy those Catholics who do not return to their baptismal vocation of holiness of life.

Ponder the question Jesus asks: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (Lk 6: 41ff) Why does Jesus ask this question? He asks because this is one of those subtle temptations of Satan which if not rejected leads to what secular humanism is based on, namely, the individual makes himself/herself the sole arbiter and judge of what is morally right and wrong and ultimately, God has no place in life. This serious moral fault most frequently is manifested by what Jesus took so many to task for – hypocrisy.

Look at what we see today in our society and culture. Society has a definite purpose and that is to respect and defend the dignity of every single person both as an individual and as one who lives with and among other persons with the same dignity. (CCC, 2419-2425) The objective truth of this must be reflected in everything the society does and, if it is not, then justice becomes tyranny and the common good is replaced by that "dictatorship of relativism" so clearly described by Pope Benedict XVI. What happens then is that discrimination among persons rules and ultimately, all persons are considered by society as objects to be used and manipulated and not

as subjects to be respected, protected and afforded their God-given rights to life and true freedom.

Within the Church this temptation to the hypocrisy Jesus condemned usually takes the form of what I call a “neo-Pharisaism” and a “neo-Sadduceeism”. The former style themselves to be the true and faithful Catholics and everyone else who does not agree with them as far as Catholic teaching and practice are not truly Catholic. However, what they do is choose only the teachings and Church discipline they like and the rest they feel free to reject or just ignore. These persons rely almost exclusively on the internet to spread their “traditional catholicism” and they openly criticize everything which does not comport with their contrived version of the Catholic faith and Catholic life and discipline. It spans the spectrum from doctrine, liturgy, morality and social teaching to involvement in society.

The latter style themselves as Catholic but in fact do next to nothing to manifest that they are Catholic and take seriously their faith and its practice. They, too, are very selective of Church teaching and practice and adhere only to what they think supports an ideology they agree with or a relatively easy norm for them to follow but only when it is convenient. These Catholics reject the Church’s true discipline as an imposition on what they call freedom which, in fact, is not true freedom but something much more like license. They too revert to the internet these days to try to spread their brand of “progressive catholicism” and like their counterparts are very critical of anyone or anything not in full agreement (more like complete submission) with their contrived version of the Catholic faith and Catholic life and discipline.

In both cases the hypocrisy is easily seen and understood by everyone except them; in both cases they reveal a fundamental lack of Christ-like charity and display within the Church an imitation of the secularized society. In both cases their actions belie their words. What they lack in Christ-like charity also reveals the superficial nature of their faith and that glaring lack of the obedience of faith which is the hallmark of the members of the Communion of Saints. We need to examine our own consciences in this regard and if we find we have any inclinations toward one or

both of these false notions of Catholicism, we must rid ourselves of them in the Sacrament of Penance and reattach ourselves to Christ, the one true vine on which we are to be His fruitful branches.

Recall the words of Christ: “Whoever is not with Me is against Me and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.” (Lk 11: 23). St. Paul writes of these evils and gives the Church its understanding of its own life as a reflection of Christ’s life. “See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another’s good and, for that matter, the good of all.” (1Thes 5: 15) Before all else, Catholics must treat one another with the love and mercy with which Christ treats us. Read the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. It is an excellent point for each of us to sincerely examine our relationship with God and other Catholics.

To be sure, our present times are very disturbed and certainly misguided, but we are not without hope. We are being tried in the very crucible of our times by God because He loves us, and He seeks to strengthen and refine our faith in Him so that His Gospel will shine brighter than any error or “fable” and that all men and women will be united to Him in His Church.

St. Paul, as he so often does, gives the Church its basis for continuing to proclaim the name of Christ boldly to all. “Yes, Jews demand ‘signs’ and Greeks look for ‘wisdom’, but we preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles ...For God’s folly is wiser than men, and His weakness more powerful than men.” (1 Cor 1: 22-25)

Part Five: Some Conclusions

Recall what I said in Part One of this Pastoral Letter regarding what all of us need to do to confront the serious errors of our times. We, the clergy, religious and lay faithful must return to the only true and reliable sources of our faith and life – the Sacred Scriptures and Holy Tradition. As the Catholic faithful the Lord has entrusted to each of us a share in His three-fold office of teaching, sanctifying and governing His Church, as well as the Church’s mission to the world in every age to announce the Good News of the Gospel. While all the Catholic faithful are called to this ministry, all are called to exercise this ministry according to the specific vocations the Lord has given us, but the mission is the same. (cf. Rom 12: 3-8)

Recall the Lord’s question: “Who are My mother, and who are my brethren?” (Mt 12: 48ff) and how He answers this question. Read the Acts of the Apostles and find numerous descriptions of how the entire body of Christians and not just the Apostles and presbyters evangelized and catechized new converts (Acts 11: 19-26) Thus, to be true to our common vocation of holiness of life and to our specific vocations we must be willing and able to live the faith in the love and knowledge of God and His Church, and by our words and example teach the faith to others.

And so first, what should every Catholic believe and know of our faith and our Catholic life? We must know the fundamentals of our faith and life such as: the Most Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Immaculate Conception, the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Lord, the Assumption, the four dogmas regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary, the seven sacraments, the three theological virtues, the four cardinal virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, the Ten Commandments, the four marks of the Church and the three attributes of the Church, the five precepts of the Church, the fourteen Stations of the Cross.

Additionally, all of us need to know and understand what sin is and the two types of sin as mortal and venial; the four last things

as defined by the Church; the four types of prayer; the definition of grace and the two types of grace; the Church's definition of a sacrament and what *ex opere operato* means for each sacrament; the meaning of transubstantiation; the four Mysteries of the Rosary; and there is so much more to the richness and depth of our faith that we must know, understand and live so that we can faithfully teach and hand it on in its full integrity to others.

Listen again and take to heart St. John's proclamation: "Of His fullness we have all had a share – grace following upon grace." (Jn 1: 16)

The above is but a partial description of what every baptized and confirmed Catholic needs to know and live and then further their understanding of in the course of their lives. Be certain that just knowing the faith is not enough. Our knowledge must be accompanied by the right understanding of what we know, and our understanding must lead to our wise and prudent and just living of what we know and understand to be true. This comes from our obedient and attentive acceptance of the authority of the Magisterium.

Second, what then does this mean for the Catholic clergy and religious? Not only must we know all of the above as well as the theology and philosophy which are at the foundation of our belief and practice, but we must hone our preaching and teaching skills to be able to be the principal teachers, sanctifiers and shepherds of the Church and its mission to the world. This can and must be done by our dedication to daily personal and communal prayer and meditation, our constant and consistent works of charity, and our willing acts of self-mortification. Additionally, all clergy and religious must engage in serious personal study of the theological sciences as well as attend regular continuing education conferences. It is the serious duty of the bishop to provide all of these opportunities for his clergy and the religious living and serving in his diocese.

In a special way, the clergy and religious who are clerics, have an obligation to know and understand liturgical theology and discipline so as to be able to celebrate all of the Church's sacred

rites according to the mind of the Church. Not to do so causes confusion among the faithful who have the right to the correct and reverent celebration of the sacraments at all reasonable times. The liturgical deviations and gimmicks of the past and present are not only wrong but often lead to an attitude of indifferentism, that there is nothing true and distinctive about our Catholic faith. The very same holds true for the moral and social teachings of the Church. The clergy must be able to teach and guide the faithful according to the mind and direction of the Church. Again, the past and present “feel good” and “meaningful” advice from clergy to the faithful is a serious sin since one can never either make another manifest his/her conscience nor can one impose his wrong ideas on another’s conscience.

Third, what is the specific duty of the lay faithful in this regard? Just as it is for all and for the clergy and religious in particular, the lay faithful have a serious obligation before God and the Church to know, understand and live our faith in their homes, where they go to school, where they work and wherever they travel. With the teaching and guidance of the Church, the lay faithful must know what the moral law of God requires of them in all matters of life – marital, single life, political, work, social charity, and true human sexuality.

Understandably, the lay faithful have not had the same type of training and education in Catholic philosophy and theology as the clergy, but they can study beyond the basics as noted above. There are many good programs for Catholic Studies that can be taken, and I urge our clergy to provide regular Adult Faith Formation classes for their people and I urge the laity to attend these classes. There are excellent Catholic organizations for the laity to join and strengthen their faith so as to live it better in their daily lives. I have listed some of them in the Appendix section of this Pastoral Letter. All of this works together for the strengthening of the faith and the Church’s mission to the world.

One of the most misunderstood and misrepresented statements from the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council was that the Church in the world must be attentive to and interpret the “signs of the times”. What the Fathers meant then and what that

means now is one and the same. The Church is not to adopt the world's ways, but it is to bring to the world the light and truth of the Gospel and thereby transform and elevate it according to the will of God. Regrettably, that has not always been done but, again, we have the assurance of the Lord that He is with us and thus, we can do this, and we must do this according to our own vocations.

Finally, how do we take up this God-given mission and mandate? I suggest two things to begin, first, test your knowledge of our faith. Use the test I have included in the Appendix, first without any helps and then check your answers for correctness and then take it again. Second, commit to some time every day to prayerfully study our faith and then apply what you have learned to your daily life. These two things are personal to priest, deacon, lay man and lay woman; then commit to being as engaged as you can in your parish life and that can take many forms, all good.

In closing, meditate on the final question Jesus asked St. Peter. It gives every Catholic much to meditate on and to examine the life of faith. "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" (Jn 21: 17ff)



Notes

Having made many references to Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition in the text of this Pastoral Letter, I offer some suggestions for further study and discussion. This is not an exhaustive list of suggested readings, but it is a good way to begin one's further study of our faith and Church.

The Second Vatican Council

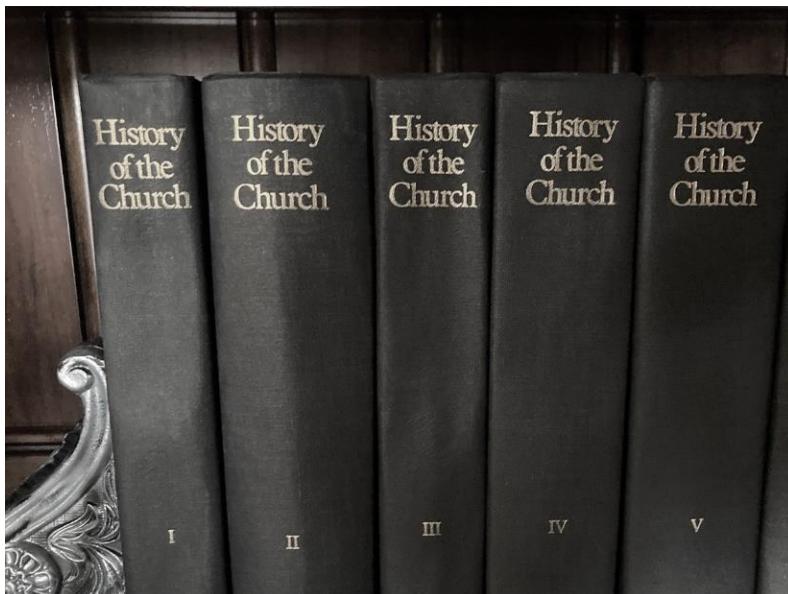
1. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.
2. *Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
3. *Dei verbum*, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.
4. *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.
5. *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church.
6. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests.
7. *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the renewal of Religious Life.
8. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People.
9. *Ad gentes divinitus*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity.

Papal Magisterial Teachings

1. *Humanae Vitae*, Pope St. Paul VI.
2. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope St. Paul VI.
3. *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope St. John Paul II.
4. *Familiaris consortio*, Pope St. John Paul II.
5. *Christifideles Laici*, Pope St. John Paul II.
6. *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope St. John Paul II.
7. *Vita Consecrata*, Pope St. John Paul II.
8. *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI.
9. *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI.

Catholic Reference Works

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
2. Code of Canon Law.
3. Butler's *Lives of the Saints*.
4. History of the Church. Ed. by Hubert Jedin and John Dolan.
5. *Liturgiam Authenticam*. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001.
6. General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition). Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2003.



Appendix

As I mentioned in the concluding remarks of the Pastoral Letter, a good way to gauge one's knowledge of the basics of our faith and Catholic life is to test that knowledge. Begin without any helps and answer each question. Your answer to each question must be completely correct and not just partially so.

1. What is the doctrine of the Most Blessed Trinity?
2. Name the Ten Commandments in their proper order.
3. Name the three Patriarchs of the Chosen People.
4. What is the doctrine of the Incarnation?
5. What is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception?
6. What is the difference between the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary?
7. Name the original Twelve Apostles.
8. What is Pentecost?
9. Name the Seven Sacraments.
10. What are the four marks of the Church?
11. Name the six Holy Days of Obligation in the United States.
12. Name the five precepts of the Church.
13. What is the doctrine of transubstantiation?
14. Name the four principal parts of the Mass.
15. What is the Church's definition of a sacrament?
16. What is the Church's doctrine on Papal Infallibility?
17. What are the two types of indulgences?
18. Name the four Cardinal Virtues.
19. Name the seven deadly sins.
20. What are the four last things?

Catholic Organizations

While this is not an exhaustive list of good Catholic Organizations for the laity to join in order to strengthen their faith and better serve the Church in and through their daily lives, they are active in the Diocese of Bismarck. All the lay faithful should consider belonging to one or more of them. Information about them can found on the Diocese of Bismarck website.

1. **Legatus.** A Catholic Organization specifically for Catholic business owners and Catholic business executives.
2. **Catholic Physicians Guild.** A Catholic Organization specifically for all Catholic doctors, nurses and all other healthcare professionals. It is an affiliate of the Catholic Medical Association.
3. **St. Raymond of Peñafort Chapter.** An affiliate of the Catholic Bar Association which is specifically for Catholic judges, lawyers and all others in the legal profession.
4. **The Knights of Columbus.**
5. **The Catholic Daughters of America.**
6. **Troops of Saint George.**

