



Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

It is a great joy for us to have this encounter on the day after Trinity Sunday, in the month of June, traditionally devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to praying for the sanctification of the clergy. I hope that our conversation and dialog will be helpful to all of us in responding to call of the Lord, who greatly desires that we should be holy priests, true shepherds according to His mind and heart. Pope Francis often reminds us that Catholic clerics are not government clerks. We should not see ourselves primarily as bearers of a position, but rather of a mission. We are called to be men of profound communion with God and communion with the Church. The Holy Father, when speaking to priests and seminarians, usually identifies three dimensions of their communion in the Church: with the Bishop as their father, with their brother priests, and with the faithful.

1. For the first point, we know that the Holy Spirit urges priests to go out and spread the Word of God, but we must avoid the danger of going off on their own without any direction. For this reason, the Holy Spirit also inspires harmony, so that priests remain in communion and constant dialogue with their Bishop, whose fatherly role is to help them discern the right path. In a recent meeting with seminarians, Pope Francis reminded them that, “The Bishop doesn’t just assign a task – ‘take care of this parish’ – as if he were the head of a bank that assigns tasks to employees. No, the Bishop gives a mission: ‘Go, sanctify those people, bring Christ to those people.’ It is another level. ... You can’t be a good priest without a filial dialogue with the Bishop.” It might be challenging for those of you who are incardinated elsewhere or who belong to religious orders to identify with the Bishop of this Eparchy as your Father. Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future there will only be one Syro-Malabar Eparchy in the United States, and you must all be clear that unity with the Eparchial Bishop is the condition for your pastoral effectiveness.

2. Secondly, while not all priests can be close friends, it is possible to become brothers. Despite the vast size of your Eparchy, you are called to support and genuinely respect one another and the Bishop. Always avoid backbiting gossip, which the Pope calls “the plague of the priesthood.” Any kind of public attacks should be out of the question. Rather, brotherly conversation, face to face when possible, including fraternal correction when necessary, is a great help to our sanctification. In this way, all the members of the priestly brotherhood can bear their burdens together in charity. In the same vein, it is important to work for reconciliation in those conflicts and disagreements that are inevitable among brothers.

3. The final communion that priests must care for is their relationship with the People of God. In that same meeting with seminarians I mentioned earlier, the Holy Father said, “Please do not forget your mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, village, poverty, the difficulties of families: do not forget them ... Because with this, with this memory, you will know how to speak to the people of God, how to serve the people of God.” (24 November 2018). Pope Francis says that when we forget this, we fall into clericalism. [Clericalism, as we know, is a factor in all abuses by



priests, but it also takes subtle forms of imposition of power. Sometimes, instead of being spiritual fathers who form the faithful in true freedom, priests become bureaucrats or even little dictators, even in sacred matters such as preparation for Marriage and the other Sacraments. Such clericalism is deeply opposed to the meek and humble Heart of Christ, burning with compassionate love. Humanity enslaved by sin has been freed at the great cost of Christ's Precious Blood, so that the Heart of Jesus can gradually become the Heart of the world, the Heart of all human hearts. To be ministers at the service of the Gospel, we priests need unceasing "heart to Heart" contact with Christ, who calls us to break the Bread of His love, to forgive sins in His name and to guide His flock. Even our sins, our limitations and our weaknesses ought to bring us back to the heart of Jesus.] We must humbly implore our Lord to preserve us from imposing ourselves on the people we should serving (Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, 19 June 2009).

Thank you for your attention. I would now be happy to take some of your questions.