

**Letter to Mothers of Priests and Seminarians and to all those who Exercise the Gift of Spiritual Maternity in their regard on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Mother of God**

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Causa nostrae Letitiae – Cause of our Joy!

The Christian People have always venerated the Blessed Virgin Mary with profound gratitude, contemplating in her the Cause of our every true Joy.

Indeed, in welcoming the Eternal Word into her immaculate womb, Mary Most Holy gave birth to the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world. In Him, God himself has come to meet man, he has lifted him up from sin and he has given him eternal life; that is, a share in his very own life. By adhering to God's Will, Mary participated in a unique and unrepeatable way in the mystery of our redemption, thereby becoming the Mother of God, the Gate of Heaven and the Cause of our Joy.

In a similar way, the entire Church looks with admiration and deep gratitude upon all mothers of priests and of those who, having received this lofty vocation, have embarked upon the path of formation. It is therefore with deep joy that I address myself to them.

The sons whom they welcomed and educated, in fact, have been chosen by Christ from all eternity to become his "chosen friends" and living and indispensable instruments of His Presence in the world. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the lives of priests are definitively taken up by Jesus and immersed in him, such that in them it is Jesus himself who walks and works among men.

So great is this mystery that the priest is even called alter Christus – another Christ. His frail humanity, elevated by the power of the Holy Spirit to a new and higher union with the Person of Jesus, becomes a place of encounter with the Son of God who became incarnate, died and rose for us. For when a priest teaches the faith of the Church, it is Christ who speaks to the People through him. When he prudently guides the faithful entrusted to him, it is Christ who shepherds his sheep. And when he celebrates the Sacraments, in an eminent way the Most Holy Eucharist, it is Christ himself who through his ministers continues the work of man's salvation and makes himself truly present in the world.

Normally it is in the family, in the parents' love, and in an early education in the faith that a priestly vocation finds that rich and fertile soil in which availability to the will of God can take root and draw the nourishment it needs. At the same time, every vocation also represents for the family whence it comes an irrevocable change that exceeds all human parameters and calls everyone to conversion.

Every member of a man's family and all those persons closest to him are involved in this change, which Christ brings about in the life of those whom he has chosen

and called. But the participation given to mothers of priests is quite unique and special. For unique and special are the spiritual consolations which they derive from having carried in the womb one who has become Christ's minister. Indeed, every mother cannot but rejoice in seeing the life of her son not only fulfilled but also clothed with a most exceptional divine favor which embraces and transforms it for all eternity.

If an unexpected "distance", mysteriously more radical than any other natural separation, seems to be created in relation to the life of one's son through his vocation and ordination, in reality the Church's two thousand years of experience teaches us that when a man is ordained a priest, his mother "receives" him in a completely new and unexpected way; so much so that she is called to see in the fruit of her own womb a "father" who by God's will is called to generate and accompany a multitude of brothers and sisters to eternal life. Every mother of a priest mysteriously becomes a "daughter of her son." Towards him, she may therefore also exercise a new motherhood through the discreet yet extremely efficacious and inestimably precious closeness of prayer, and by offering of her own life for the ministry of her son.

This new "fatherhood" - for which the Seminarian is prepared, which the priest has been given, and which benefits all God's People - needs to be accompanied by assiduous prayer and personal sacrifice, in order that a priest's free adherence to the divine will may continually be renewed and strengthened, that he may never tire in the battle of faith, and that he may unite his own life ever more completely to the Sacrifice of Christ the Lord.

This work of true support, which has always been essential to the life of the Church, today seems more urgent than ever, especially in the secularized West, which awaits and stands in need of a new and radical proclamation of Christ. Mothers of priests and seminarians thus represent a true and veritable "army", which from earth offers prayers and sacrifice to heaven, and from heaven intercedes in even greater number so that every grace and blessing may be poured out upon the lives of the Church's sacred ministers.

Therefore, with all my heart I wish to encourage and offer special thanks to all mothers of priests and seminarians - and along with them to all consecrated and lay women who have received (perhaps through the invitation addressed to them during the Year of the Priest) the gift of spiritual motherhood towards those who are called to priestly ministry. By offering their lives, their prayers, their sufferings and their hardships as well as their joys for the fidelity and sanctification of God's ministers, they have come to share in a special way in the motherhood of Holy Church, whose model and fulfillment is found in the divine maternity of Mary Most Holy.

Lastly, we raise a special hymn of thanks to heaven - to those mothers who, having already been called from this life, now contemplate in all its fullness the splendor of Christ's Priesthood in which their sons have become sharers, and who intercede for them in a unique and mysteriously far more efficacious manner.

With heartfelt wishes for a New Year full of grace, I warmly impart to each and every mother a most affectionate blessing, and I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of Priests, to grant you the gift of an ever more radical identification with her, the perfect disciple and Daughter of her Son.

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[Translation by Diane Montagna, Zenit]