LUMEN GENTIUM: CHAPTER 5

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS: GRACE, CONVERSION, AND FIDELITY TO CHRIST

Our previous reading considered the vocation of the lay faithful and their responsibilities within the Church and the world. We now consider the holiness to which every member of the Church is called.

Today we read Chapter V, “The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church,” Sections 39-42.

We will continue reading alongside Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Church’s perennial teaching. Particular attention is needed when we encounter the holiness of the Church, baptismal grace, the duties of pastors, and the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

The call to holiness applies to everyone. Its universality does not diminish the particular obligations of bishops, priests, and religious.

We must also examine the distance between what this chapter teaches and what has happened within the Church. There have been grave, documented failures among clergy and religious, including abuse and failures of leadership. There have also been authoritative warnings about worldliness and the neglect of the spiritual disciplines necessary for fidelity. These matters belong within our reading because holiness must govern actual conduct.

Our question is concrete: Are Catholics being formed to become holy, and are those entrusted with spiritual authority living and teaching the conversion they ask of others?

I. READ

Read Chapter V, Sections 39-42, “The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church.”

YOU WILL FIND THE COMPLETE CHAPTER READING AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT.

The section headings below identify the subjects of the Council's text; the explanations that follow are our commentary.

Section 39 – The holiness of the Church and the holiness of her members

Ephesians 5:25-27 directs our attention to Christ, who gives Himself for the Church and sanctifies her.

Her holiness comes from Him. It cannot be measured simply by the conduct of those who hold office within her. Yet that distinction must never become an excuse for wrongdoing. The holiness Christ gives His Church places real obligations upon her members. A priest's abuse of another person contradicts his vocation. A superior's protection of wrongdoing contradicts the responsibility entrusted to him.

The Church's holiness gives us a reason to demand repentance and correction.

Section 40 – Holiness received and holiness lived

The chapter describes Baptism as bringing a real participation in divine life. It then requires the faithful to preserve and develop the holiness received. We must retain both statements.

Grace is God's gift. The Christian must cooperate with it. Baptism does not make later sin harmless or perseverance automatic.

The call to perfection also does not mean that ordinary Christians must possess the sinlessness or heavenly perfection they have not yet attained. The text itself acknowledges our continuing need for forgiveness.

Section 41 – Holiness within the duties of each vocation

This section begins its particular treatment with the shepherds of Christ's flock. Their ministry must be carried out with humility, courage, prayer, sacrifice, and pastoral charity.

Priests are told to nourish their work through contemplation and to grow in holiness through the ministry they exercise.

We should therefore examine more than whether ecclesiastical work is being accomplished. Are souls being taught the faith? Are the sacraments being reverently administered? Are those entrusted to a pastor's care being protected?

This section also considers married people, parents, widows, single people, workers, and those who suffer. Their circumstances can become places of sanctification through grace and fidelity to God.

This requires the conversion of our conduct within those circumstances. A vocation cannot sanctify the deliberate violation of its duties.

Section 42 – Charity, sacrifice, and the evangelical counsels

The chapter identifies love of God above all things, and love of our neighbor because of God, as fundamental to holiness.

It names concrete means: receiving God's word, the sacraments, the liturgy, prayer, self-denial, service, and the exercise of virtue. It also honors martyrdom and gives a special place to virginity or celibacy for the kingdom. Poverty and obedience are presented through the example of Christ.

These teachings require careful application. Charity cannot authorize sin. Religious obedience cannot authorize wrongdoing. The holiness possible within marriage does not erase the distinctive excellence of a life of continence freely undertaken for God.

The chapter ends by warning against attachment to riches and accommodation to this passing world.

II. SCRIPTURE

Sacred Scripture gives the call to holiness a definite moral content.

I Thessalonians 4:3-8 joins sanctification to chastity. St. Paul warns against sexual immorality and the exploitation of another person.

"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour: Not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles that know not God: And that no man

overreach, nor circumvent his brother in business: because the Lord is the avenger of all these things, as we have told you before, and have testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto sanctification. Therefore, he that despiseth these things, despiseth not man, but God, who also hath given his holy Spirit in us."

This passage prevents us from turning holiness into a vague religious feeling. The treatment of another person's body and dignity belongs directly to obedience to God. No priestly office, religious profession, or spiritual reputation makes an exception to that obligation.

In John 15:5, Our Lord teaches our dependence upon Him.

"I am the vine: you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing."

Ephesians 2:8-10 holds together salvation by grace and the good works for which Christians are created in Christ.

"For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man may glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them."

Philippians 2:12-13 likewise joins our responsibility to God's action within us.

"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, (as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but much more now in my absence,) with fear and trembling work out your salvation. For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will."

These passages exclude both spiritual self-sufficiency and passivity. We cannot manufacture sanctity through organization or personal determination. Neither may we refuse the obedience and effort grace enables.

Romans 6:1-4 rejects the thought that grace gives permission to continue in sin. Baptism brings us into Christ's death so that we may walk in newness of life. An account of baptismal holiness that leaves deliberate wrongdoing undisturbed has lost the apostolic demand.

“What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Know you not that all we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism into death, that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.”

Our Lord joins love to the keeping of His commandments in John 14:15.

“If you love me, keep my commandments.”

I Corinthians 13:1-3 teaches that impressive gifts and sacrifices are empty without charity.

“If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

Religious visibility cannot establish holiness. Neither can success in fundraising, administration, public speaking, or social work establish that a person’s conduct is faithful to Christ.

I Peter 5:2-3 tells shepherds to care for the flock willingly, without greed or domination, and to become examples to those entrusted to them.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking care of it, not by constraint, but willingly, according to God: not for filthy lucre’s sake, but voluntarily: Neither as lording it over the clergy, but being made a pattern of the flock from the heart.”

Ezekiel 34:2-4 condemns shepherds who feed themselves while neglecting and mistreating the flock.

“Son of man, prophesy concerning the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to the shepherds: Thus saith the Lord God: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, that fed themselves: should not the flocks be fed by the shepherds? You ate the milk, and you clothed yourselves with the wool, and you killed that which was fat: but my flock you did

not feed. The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost: but you ruled over them with rigour, and with a high hand."

Matthew 18:6 gives a terrible warning concerning the corruption of the little ones.

"But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea."

These passages make the protection of the vulnerable a pastoral obligation. They also make abuse of spiritual authority a matter of grave accountability before God.

Matthew 19:12 and I Corinthians 7:32-35 provide the scriptural foundation for continence undertaken for the kingdom and undivided service to the Lord.

"For there are eunuchs, who were born so from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, who were made so by men: and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it."

"But I would have you to be without solicitude. He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your profit: not to cast a snare upon you; but for that which is decent, and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord, without impediment."

Hebrews 13:4 requires honor for marriage and fidelity within it.

"Marriage honorable in all, and the bed undefiled. For fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

We must preserve these teachings together.

Finally, Luke 9:23 places self-denial and the cross within discipleship.

“And he said to all: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Hebrews 12:14 commands the pursuit of holiness.

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness: without which no man shall see God.”

The Christian life cannot be organized around avoiding every sacrifice that fidelity requires.

III. REMEMBER – WHAT CAME BEFORE?

The call to holiness did not begin with the Second Vatican Council. Earlier witnesses also help us identify what must be preserved when this chapter is taught.

St. Cyprian – Baptism begins a life that must be preserved

In *On the Lord’s Prayer*, Section 12, Cyprian explains that those sanctified in Baptism pray for that sanctification to continue in them. Daily prayer acknowledges their continuing need for God’s protection and cleansing.

His account joins a real baptismal gift to perseverance and repentance. It gives no support to treating a person’s baptismal dignity as proof that his subsequent conduct needs no correction.

St. Augustine – The commandments and the help of grace

In *On Nature and Grace*, Chapter 50, also identified as XLIII in the older division, Augustine explains that God’s commands direct us both to act and to ask for the help we need.

Human weakness requires grace. It cannot become a standing justification for refusing conversion. The pastor must help a struggling person seek that grace and take the steps obedience requires.

St. Gregory the Great – A shepherd must live what he teaches

In *Pastoral Rule*, Part II, Chapters 2-3, Gregory requires purity of thought and exemplary conduct from the spiritual ruler. The shepherd's life must support his instruction.

The responsibility attached to sacred office is substantial.

A minister who demands obedience while excusing his own dishonesty, impurity, greed, or cruelty contradicts the pattern Gregory describes.

St. Thomas Aquinas – Charity and the evangelical counsels

In the *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Question 184, Articles 1 and 3, Thomas explains that Christian perfection consists essentially in charity. The counsels serve that perfection by removing impediments to its exercise.

This distinction helps us understand how all Christians can be called to perfect love while particular Christians embrace the evangelical counsels in a distinctive way.

The universal call does not render religious consecration unnecessary or meaningless.

In II-II, Question 104, Article 5, Thomas also explains the limits of obedience to a human superior. Commands contrary to God, or outside the superior's authority, do not acquire binding force simply because a superior gives them.

The Council of Trent – Real renewal, obedience, and restoration after sin

Session VI, Chapter 7, describes justification as including inward sanctification and renewal. Chapter 11 insists upon the obligation and possibility, with divine help, of keeping God's commandments.

Chapters 14-15 address restoration after a fall and the loss of justifying grace through mortal sin.

These teachings supply necessary boundaries for reading baptismal holiness. Grace changes us; it does not remove the moral law. Serious sin requires repentance and reconciliation.

St. Francis de Sales – Devotion within every rightful vocation

In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, Chapter 3, Francis teaches that devotion belongs within different occupations and states of life. Its practices must take account of a person's duties, circumstances, and strength.

A parent must provide for the household. A bishop must care for his flock. Their duties differ, and devotion should help them fulfill those duties faithfully.

Ordinary responsibilities can become the place of serious spiritual growth.

Pius XI – Holiness is required of all

In *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, Sections 2-3, Pius XI applies Christ's command to perfection to everyone. He expressly rejects confining that call to a privileged group.

This teaching predates the Council by more than forty years.

We should recognize continuity where the evidence establishes it.

Pius XII – The excellence of consecrated virginity and the holiness of marriage

In *Sacra Virginitas*, especially Sections 24, 32, and 45-47, Pius XII teaches the superiority of virginity or celibacy for God over the married state, while affirming that married Christians can attain holiness and that virginity is not necessary for Christian perfection.

The excellence of a state of life does not establish the personal holiness of everyone who enters it.

A religious profession imposes obligations. It cannot substitute for fulfilling them.

IV. BENEDICT XVI

Benedict XVI's general audience of April 13, 2011, considers holiness directly. He places its source in God's transforming grace and gives practical attention to Sunday Eucharist, daily prayer, and decisions governed by the commandments.

His explanation gives us concrete questions for Catholic formation.

Are people learning to pray? Are they being helped to worship faithfully? Do they understand that love of God governs their choices?

Benedict also addressed grave failures within the Church without concealing their seriousness.

In his *Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland,* dated March 19, 2010, Section 4 identifies neglected spiritual practices, secularized thinking among priests and religious, and grave failures by bishops in handling it. He requires accountability and cooperation with competent civil authorities.

These are documented departures from the obligations of sacred ministry and consecrated life. They cannot be dismissed as mere misunderstandings by those outside the Church.

Before his election as pope, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's meditation for the Ninth Station of the 2005 Way of the Cross also confronted corruption within the Church, including among priests, and contempt for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Faithfulness to the Church includes the willingness to name such sins and seek their correction.

V. PILLARS COMMENTARY

The plumb line is the truth received from Christ and handed down in His Church.

Our examination must reach both teaching and conduct. A chapter may state an obligation faithfully while members of the Church violate it gravely.

That distinction makes the failure identifiable. It must never become a way of avoiding responsibility for it.

Where departures have been acknowledged

The evidence includes failures of personal conduct, spiritual formation, and ecclesiastical leadership.

The Irish case discussed above establishes abuse and failures in its handling. It does not establish the guilt of every priest, religious, or bishop. Each accusation against an individual still requires evidence.

The spiritual problems also extend beyond that case. In *Vita Consecrata*, Sections 37-38, John Paul II calls religious institutes back to their rules and warns that adaptation can become worldliness, excessive reliance on efficiency, or a secularized way of living. He insists upon prayer and ascetic discipline.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Sections 30-31, he places holiness at the center of pastoral work. Section 37 acknowledges the crisis surrounding confession; Section 38 warns against relying upon our planning and activity as though these were the source of spiritual fruitfulness.

These sources provide grounds for serious examination. They do not establish a single cause for every modern failure or prove that the Council instructed anyone to abandon holiness.

Failing to live priestly and religious commitments

Section 41 requires pastors to grow in holiness through their ministry. Section 42 commands chastity, poverty, obedience, and self-denial.

Where a priest violates his commitment to celibate chastity, or a religious deliberately violates the vows professed, the failure concerns a real obligation freely undertaken before God.

Where prayer and spiritual discipline are deliberately displaced by comfort, ambition, or continual distraction, the foundations of fidelity are weakened.

The correction requires repentance, faithful sacramental practice, sound spiritual direction, and renewed observance of the obligations belonging to the person's vocation. Superiors must provide formation and exercise appropriate oversight.

Religious language and successful projects cannot compensate for an unconverted life.

Abusing the vulnerable and protecting wrongdoing

Abuse is a grave violation of another person and a betrayal of spiritual trust. Concealing credible evidence or allowing concern for an institution's reputation to displace the protection of those at risk compounds the injury.

The correction must include protection of victims and potential victims, truthful investigation, appropriate restrictions while allegations are assessed, and just accountability. Ecclesiastical procedures and the responsibilities of civil authorities must be respected. Repentance does not cancel the demands of justice.

Prayer and penance belong to renewal. They cannot replace the actions needed to stop harm.

Treating the Church's holiness as protection from scrutiny

Section 39 must never be used to imply that a minister's conduct is holy because he represents the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* Sections 823-827, distinguishes the holiness Christ gives the Church from the sins of her members and her continuing need for purification.

An appeal to the Church's holiness cannot make an accusation disappear or excuse a failure of leadership.

The necessary correction is truthful acknowledgment, repentance, and action proportionate to the wrongdoing established.

Reducing holiness to usefulness or respectability

The chapter recognizes the good holiness brings to earthly society. It also explicitly grounds holiness in Christ, grace, the sacraments, charity, and eternal glory.

We depart from that teaching when a Catholic institution measures its mission entirely by professional success, social approval, or material assistance, while neglecting worship, doctrine, and conversion.

Feeding the hungry and caring for the sick are serious Christian duties. Those works should express the love of God and neighbor that gives the chapter its direction.

A religious community must examine whether its activity remains rooted in its consecration and approved mission.

Using the universal call to flatten distinct vocations

Every Christian is called to holiness. It does not follow that consecrated virginity, marriage, and religious profession are interchangeable.

Section 42 itself gives an eminent place to virginity or celibacy for the kingdom. An interpretation that dismisses its distinctive excellence cannot appeal honestly to this chapter as its authority.

The correction requires teaching the value and obligations of each vocation accurately. Families need formation for faithful marriage. Those called to consecration need encouragement and preparation for the sacrifice they undertake. Neither group is helped by misrepresenting the other.

Using obedience against truth and conscience

The chapter commends cooperation with bishops and the voluntary obedience of those who embrace the counsels.

These passages must be read within the limits of legitimate authority explained by St. Thomas. A demand to lie, facilitate abuse, or commit another sin cannot become virtuous through an appeal to obedience. At the same time, personal preference does not release a person from a lawful obligation.

The correction requires fidelity to God, respect for rightful authority, and the courage to refuse wrongdoing.

Speaking of grace while leaving sin undisturbed

Section 40's broad language about the Holy Spirit must be read with its explicit account of Baptism and the duty to preserve holiness. It does not state that every person already possesses sanctifying grace or that everyone will be saved regardless of repentance.

Its account also needs the fuller teaching of Trent on mortal sin and restoration through Penance. A brief treatment of holiness cannot serve as a complete account of justification and reconciliation.

We get off the plumb line when the baptized are reassured about their dignity while being left uninstructed about serious sin and the need to return to God.

Pastors must teach the commandments, make confession accessible, and help penitents amend their lives.

What this examination establishes

The earlier sources support the central teaching that every Christian is called to holiness. They also preserve the special character of consecrated life, the necessity of grace, the moral law, and the demands of repentance.

The sources examined do not establish a doctrinal reversal in Sections 39-42. They do establish grave failures within modern Church life, including among priests, religious, and those responsible for oversight.

Calling those failures practical does not make them minor. Some involve crimes, profound injury to victims, and betrayal of sacred responsibilities.

THESE DEPARTURES REQUIRE CORRECTION WHEREVER THEY OCCUR

We must affirm what faithfully expresses the received faith, explain what needs fuller treatment, and confront conduct that violates it. An appeal to renewal has no credibility if it leaves serious wrongdoing protected and conversion neglected.

VI. REFLECT

As we finish today's reading, ask yourself:

Am I pursuing the holiness my own vocation requires – and am I willing to seek truthful, just correction when those entrusted with spiritual authority betray the responsibilities of their calling?

VII. DEEPER THOUGHTS TO CONCLUDE THIS DAY

The Church needs holy priests and religious. Their fidelity matters to the people they teach, the children they protect, the penitents they receive, and the communities they serve.

The harm done by a betrayal of that trust cannot be repaired by praising the beauty of the vocation alone. Those who have suffered need to be heard. Those responsible must answer for their actions. Those still at risk must be protected.

We should also remember the priests and religious who persevere faithfully, often in difficult circumstances. Justice requires that we neither conceal another's guilt nor assign it to someone without evidence.

Pray today for victims of abuse and spiritual betrayal. Pray for their healing and for the people responsible for protecting them to act with courage.

Pray for bishops and superiors to govern justly, for priests to be faithful to prayer and sacrifice, and for religious to live their consecration with integrity.

Ask for the grace to fulfill your own duties before God. The truth we invoke when examining the Church also calls us to repentance.

CHRIST CALLS HIS CHURCH TO HOLINESS. HIS GIFT REQUIRES OUR FIDELITY, AND OUR FAILURES REQUIRE REPENTANCE, JUSTICE, AND CORRECTION.

THE FOLLOWING IS THE CHAPTER TEXT SUPPLIED FOR THIS READING:

CHAPTER V

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH

39. The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," (1*) loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this

that He might sanctify her.(214) He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification".(215) However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others; in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called "evangelical." This practice of the counsels, under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness.

40. The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect".(216)(2*) Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength(217) and that they might love each other as Christ loves them.(218) The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints",(219) and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience",(220) and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness.(221) Since truly we all offend in many things (222) we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our debts"(223)(3*)

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity;(4*) by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

41. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.

In the first place, the shepherds of Christ's flock must holily and eagerly, humbly and courageously carry out their ministry, in imitation of the eternal high Priest, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. They ought to fulfill this duty in such a way that it will be the principal

means also of their own sanctification. Those chosen for the fullness of the priesthood are granted the ability of exercising the perfect duty of pastoral charity by the grace of the sacrament of Orders. This perfect duty of pastoral charity (5*) is exercised in every form of episcopal care and service, prayer, sacrifice and preaching. By this same sacramental grace, they are given the courage necessary to lay down their lives for their sheep, and the ability of promoting greater holiness in the Church by their daily example, having become a pattern for their flock.(224)

Priests, who resemble bishops to a certain degree in their participation of the sacrament of Orders, form the spiritual crown of the bishops.(6*) They participate in the grace of their office and they should grow daily in their love of God and their neighbor by the exercise of their office through Christ, the eternal and unique Mediator. They should preserve the bond of priestly communion, and they should abound in every spiritual good and thus present to all men a living witness to God.(7*) All this they should do in emulation of those priests who often, down through the course of the centuries, left an outstanding example of the holiness of humble and hidden service. Their praise lives on in the Church of God. By their very office of praying and offering sacrifice for their own people and the entire people of God, they should rise to greater holiness. Keeping in mind what they are doing and imitating what they are handling,(8*) these priests, in their apostolic labors, rather than being ensnared by perils and hardships, should rather rise to greater holiness through these perils and hardships. They should ever nourish and strengthen their action from an abundance of contemplation, doing all this for the comfort of the entire Church of God. All priests, and especially those who are called "diocesan priests," due to the special title of their ordination, should keep continually before their minds the fact that their faithful loyalty toward and their generous cooperation with their bishop is of the greatest value in their growth in holiness.

Ministers of lesser rank are also sharers in the mission and grace of the Supreme Priest. In the first place among these ministers are deacons, who, in as much as they are dispensers of Christ's mysteries and servants of the Church,(9*) should keep themselves free from every vice and stand before men as personifications of goodness and friends of God.(225) Clerics, who are called by the Lord and are set aside as His portion in order to prepare themselves for the various ministerial offices under the watchful eye of spiritual shepherds, are bound to bring their hearts and minds into accord with this special election (which is theirs). They will accomplish this by their constancy in prayer, by their burning love, and by their unremitting recollection of whatever is true, just and of good repute. They will accomplish all this for the glory and honor of God. Besides these already named, there are also laymen, chosen of God and called by the bishop. These laymen spend themselves completely in apostolic labors, working the Lord's field with much success.(10*).

Furthermore, married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should embue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men the example of unwearying and generous love; in this way they build up the brotherhood of charity; in so doing, they stand as the witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church; by such lives, they are a sign and a participation in that very love, with which Christ loved His Bride and for which He delivered Himself up for her.(11*) A like example, but one given in a different way, is that offered by widows and single people, who are able to make great

contributions toward holiness and apostolic endeavor in the Church. Finally, those who engage in labor—and frequently it is of a heavy nature—should better themselves by their human labors. They should be of aid to their fellow citizens. They should raise all of society, and even creation itself, to a better mode of existence. Indeed, they should imitate by their lively charity, in their joyous hope and by their voluntary sharing of each others' burdens, the very Christ who plied His hands with carpenter's tools and Who in union with His Father, is continually working for the salvation of all men. In this, then, their daily work they should climb to the heights of holiness and apostolic activity.

May all those who are weighed down with poverty, infirmity and sickness, as well as those who must bear various hardships or who suffer persecution for justice sake—may they all know they are united with the suffering Christ in a special way for the salvation of the world. The Lord called them blessed in His Gospel and they are those whom "the God of all graces, who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen and establish".(226)

Finally all Christ's faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives—and indeed through all these, will daily increase in holiness, if they receive all things with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father and if they cooperate with the divine will. In this temporal service, they will manifest to all men the love with which God loved the world.

42. "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God in Him".(227) But, God pours out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us;(228) thus the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God. Indeed, in order that love, as good seed may grow and bring forth fruit in the soul, each one of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and accept His Will, and must complete what God has begun by their own actions with the help of God's grace. These actions consist in the use of the sacraments and in a special way the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy, application of oneself to prayer, self-abnegation, lively fraternal service and the constant exercise of all the virtues. For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law,(229) rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means.(12*) It is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.

Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers.(230) From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross.

Likewise, the holiness of the Church is fostered in a special way by the observance of the counsels proposed in the Gospel by Our Lord to His disciples.(13*) An eminent position among these is held by virginity or the celibate state.(231) This is a precious gift of divine grace given

by the Father to certain souls,(232) whereby they may devote themselves to God alone the more easily, due to an undivided heart. (14*) This perfect continency, out of desire for the kingdom of heaven, has always been held in particular honor in the Church. The reason for this was and is that perfect continency for the love of God is an incentive to charity, and is certainly a particular source of spiritual fecundity in the world.

The Church continually keeps before it the warning of the Apostle which moved the faithful to charity, exhorting them to experience personally what Christ Jesus had known within Himself. This was the same Christ Jesus, who "emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave . . . becoming obedient to death",(233) and because of us "being rich, he became poor".(234) Because the disciples must always offer an imitation of and a testimony to the charity and humility of Christ, Mother Church rejoices at finding within her bosom men and women who very closely follow their Saviour who debased Himself to our comprehension. There are some who, in their freedom as sons of God, renounce their own wills and take upon themselves the state of poverty. Still further, some become subject of their own accord to another man, in the matter of perfection for love of God. This is beyond the measure of the commandments, but is done in order to become more fully like the obedient Christ.(15*)

Therefore, all the faithful of Christ are invited to strive for the holiness and perfection of their own proper state. Indeed they have an obligation to so strive. Let all then have care that they guide aright their own deepest sentiments of soul. Let neither the use of the things of this world nor attachment to riches, which is against the spirit of evangelical poverty, hinder them in their quest for perfect love. Let them heed the admonition of the Apostle to those who use this world; let them not come to terms with this world; for this world, as we see it, is passing away.(235)(16*)