

HIS EXC. ARCHBISHOP PRENDERGAST'S LETTER TO THE SONS OF MARY



ARCHDIOCESE OF HALIFAX

P.O. BOX 1527 HALIFAX N.S. B3J 2Y3

Halifax, April 4, 2005
The Annunciation of the Lord

Dear Sons of Mary,

Once again I wish to share with you a few of my reflections in all serenity and simplicity. I do so in communion of spirit and heart with Cardinal Marc Ouellet and the other bishops involved.

I will focus my attention on two circumstances: on the one hand, we are celebrating today the solemnity of the Lord's Annunciation which reveals Mary's key role in God's plan of salvation and, on the other, we have received the letter written by the Holy Father to the priests for Holy Thursday.

A third circumstance now demands our attention, that of the death of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II which occurred on Saturday. After a long and very fruitful apostolate, he has returned to the Father's house, as Cardinal Ruini stated when he announced the Pope's death. I urge you to pray for him and for the Church which he served with such fruit. But I will be able to talk about this in person with those of you with whom I will meet at the end of the week.

When she heard the words the angel Gabriel addressed to her, Mary was all upset and she wondered what such a greeting meant. Before the mission that was being presented to her, she also wondered how this would come about. Finally, it was a response of faith that she made to God's plan for her: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Lk 1:26-38).

Mary accepted for herself the mystery of obedience to God. She asked questions, but in the end, she surrendered herself totally to God even if what the angel announced seemed rather disconcerting to her. She gave her freedom to the Lord entirely!

The same idea of the total giving of one's freedom is described in number 3 of the Holy Father's letter, based on the Lord Jesus' words: "Accipite et manducate... Accipite et bibite". Following Christ and by repeating the divine Master's words, the priest's life takes on its true meaning "if he is able to offer

himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need.”

The Holy Father adds this essential passage which I quote in its entirety: “If we think about it more fully, the priest's promise of obedience, which he made on the day of Ordination and is asked to renew at the Chrism Mass, is illuminated by this relationship with the Eucharist. Obeying out of love, sacrificing even a certain legitimate freedom when the authoritative discernment of the Bishop so requires, the priest lives out in his own flesh that “take and eat” with which Christ, in the Last Supper, gave himself to the Church.”

These words from the Holy Father are like an echo of what Paul the Apostle wrote to the Philippians: Christ Jesus “emptied himself and took the form of a slave... he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death... Because of this, God highly exalted him...” (Phil 2:5-11).

Dear Sons of Mary, let us carefully weigh these remarks. The Virgin Mary was open to the angel's message in confidence, and she became the first collaborator in the work being wrought by her Son. The Holy Father, towards whom you have an admirable fidelity, calls upon you to realize, in a certain manner, within your own person, the words of Christ's Eucharistic consecration. Jesus, the Sovereign Priest, renders Himself obedient to the point of death on a cross, before being exalted above all things. Following in Christ's footsteps, in the way His Mother did and as the Holy Father reminds us, obedience, then, is a royal road for the offering of your life.

That is the context within which I am writing these few lines to you, for I am going to ask something of you that will be painful for you, something that is legitimate but that will cost you. After the Holy Father, I want to ask you to sacrifice a certain legitimate freedom in order to adhere to the authoritative discernment of the bishops. I would not want this to be perceived as a threat, but rather as a provisional measure whereby you are being asked to sacrifice a legitimate freedom.

The tradition of the Church as well as my own Ignatian tradition teach that it is often necessary to distinguish in order then to be able to understand well and thus reach a good discernment of the spirit. That is precisely what I wish to do.

I am well aware of the devotion to the Lady of All Peoples; it has a legitimate place in the Church. While recognizing that the apparitions in Amsterdam have a supernatural origin, the Ordinary of Haarlem-Amsterdam also asked that the manifestations of this devotion be subjected to his authority.

Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account, with regard to this devotion, the reaffirmation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the effect

that “the negative judgment already publicly signified in the Notification of 1974 is still valid” (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, letter of February 8, 2005).

Should we not see that what poses a problem here is not so much the recognition of the supernatural character of the apparitions in Amsterdam, but rather certain ways of considering the apparitions, or at least the impression that is given by certain ways of considering these apparitions and particularly certain formulations by Marc Bosquart which cause serious difficulties.

The discernment in these matters belongs to the bishop and I wish to apply here the Holy Father's thinking expressed above when I ask you to stop, for the time being, all public manifestations to the Lady of All Peoples until a more opportune time when the question of Marc Bosquart's writings will have been clarified. I repeat, this moratorium is provisional but required, in order to understand well the problems.

I am not unaware that the Work now bears the name of “Community of the Lady of All Peoples”. I cannot ignore either the comments made by Father Eric Roy and so many others among you who told me repeatedly that the Sons of Mary are an integral part of this Work.

In order to understand well, I must distinguish and study the question. This means that I want to seek to study the theological questions in greater depth. Therefore, I ask you to cease all public devotion at Spiri-Maria or elsewhere. I want you to understand that I am asking you to sacrifice, for the time being, something legitimate, for I am the one who has been given the difficult task of discernment.

In the course of history there have been abuses of ecclesiastical power. In certain publications of the Army of Mary, the examples of Saint Joan of Arc and Saint Padre Pio were used to illustrate this abuse of ecclesial authority in the face of spiritual phenomena out of the ordinary. This way of thinking contains several snares and can render a very poor service to those who use it. The context, the circumstances of each case must be evaluated based on their own proper merit before making a comparison.

Thus, Saint Joan of Arc was judged within the feudal context of the end of the Hundred-Year War. The trial which led to her condemnation was simply a big political plot in order to take revenge over a victorious enemy under the false pretense of heresy. More than six centuries after her death, we can only marvel at this young woman who could neither read nor write, but who confronted with an unwavering self-assurance the snares and the most refined contradictions set by a cohort of judges.

As for Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, this was a completely different situation. Before the excessive fervor of the faithful who requested his ministry, before the

attitudes of some of his own confreres even, silence and discretion were imposed upon him and he accepted them as a true religious should, in obedience and humility. "The life and mission of Padre Pio prove that difficulties and sorrows, if accepted out of love, are transformed into a privileged way of holiness, which opens onto the horizons of a greater good, known only to the Lord." That is the way the Holy Father presented the facts in his homily at the canonization of the saint on June 16, 2002.

In both cases, "by solemnly proclaiming that they [these faithful] practised heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her..." (CCC 828).

To establish a parallel between the life journey of these two saints and certain facts in the Army of Mary is an exercise that requires a just discernment to avoid falling into an easy misrepresentation. On more than one occasion, I noticed that a false interpretation was given to facts concerning the Army of Mary either in conversations or in texts in the paper *Le Royaume*. The two cases are quoted as though they were analogous although they are essentially quite different. In one case, Joan of Arc obeys "her voices", rightfully, in spite of a fake tribunal; in the other case, Padre Pio obeys his Superiors in spite of the mystical graces he was receiving.

Thus, I ask you to place yourselves in the wake of this great Padre Pio who gave the witness of an exemplary submission to his Superiors.

For the times ahead, I ask you to make your own what the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over you as men who must render an account. So act that they may fulfill their task with joy, not with sorrow, for that would be harmful to you" (Heb 13:17).

May the example of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation inspire and guide you. In her who was "full of grace" (Lk 1:26), were accomplished the essential actions through which God worked the salvation of the world. May the giving of your person, the offering of your freedom, be your participation in these same mysteries of salvation.

In Corde Jesu,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terrence Prendergast". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross at the beginning.

+Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Pontifical Commissioner