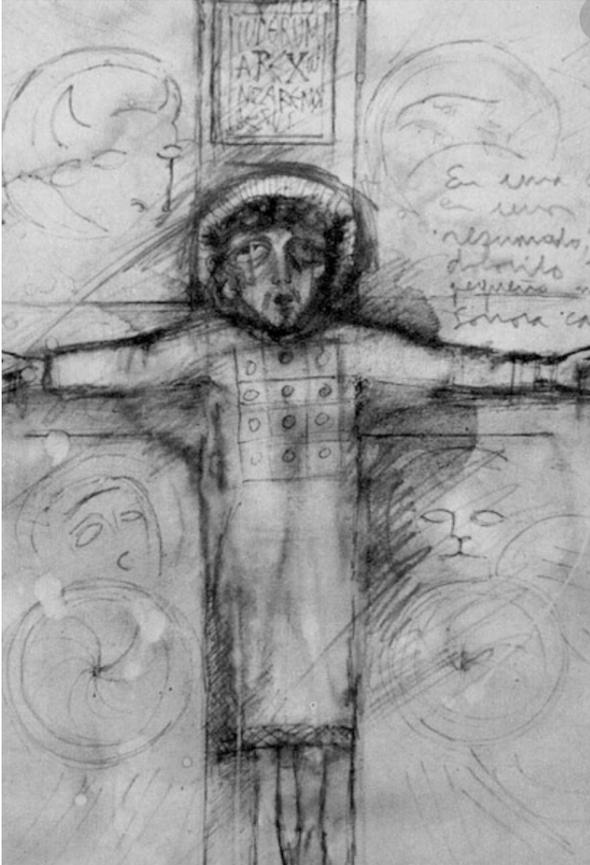


# like precious pearls on his breastplate



Is it possible to think of priests dedicated to the care of souls who are found asleep? Brethren, this is not the purpose of our call. When Christ called Peter and Andrew to the apostolate, he used these words: "Follow me, I will make you fishers of men". The life of fishermen is full of toil and dangers; they cast their nets day and night; they are not deterred from fishing by cold or heat, nor do they give up because of some unpleasant annoyance; even if, many times, they catch nothing. By the example of these brothers, the Lord shows that he who is called to the care of souls is not called to idle quietness but to continuous work, fishing.

Many set boundaries for their pastoral work; they say: I went to visit the sick who sent for me; I confessed; I brought Holy Communion; I made sure that my parishioners fulfilled their precepts; I undertook to explain the Christian doctrine in the afternoons of feast days. Nothing more is expected of me. How can you say: nothing else! How many other things the care of souls requires! Your ministry requires much more. There is this person whom you have to admonish, you have to make evident to him the pains of hell; continually exhort, instruct, invite to the sacraments, direct souls. And when, by the gift of grace,

Christ is born in his heart, he must be supported and followed. Can a parish priest, to whom Christ has given souls, feel that he has fulfilled all his duties because he has committed himself to his ministry at Easter?

The field of the parish priest is the parish; the vineyard is the souls entrusted to him. If the parish priest is lazy and sleepy, the parish soon fills up with weeds and thistles: a thousand abuses, a thousand scandals and corruption take root there. The stone enclosure is crumbling: the observance of the commandments by which souls are protected as by a wall is destroyed. Consequently, a parish without order, the faithful devoted to debauchery, without a rule of life, are indicative of the laziness and torpor of the parish priest. All this is a very grave and mortal sin in us, brothers. Each one of us must be vigilant as we await the judgement; saying: I must account for these souls. The Lord has entrusted them to me.

But if the parish priest, who is like as the eye of his parish is plunged into darkness, in what condition will the whole house be? If the salt becomes bland, what will it taste like? If the one who is to lay the firm foundation, the foundation, the light, the guidance, is afflicted with the gravest of evils, how will it be possible to care for the poor parishioners?

On his breastplate, the high priest had written the names of the children of Israel in gold and precious stones. This is the figure of Christ, the supreme priest and pontiff, who carved into his heart the souls of all, which are extremely precious to him. Christ's example teaches us priests to esteem the souls given to us of immense value before our eyes.

These words of admonition were written in 1584 by Saint Charles Borromeo to the parish priests of his diocese of Milan. Not quite the same genre of the pastoral letters of these days!

**Next Friday, 11th June - Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus - is the world day of prayer for the sanctification of priests.** Pray for your Parish Priests. May the "eyes" of the parish stay open; may the "salt" remain salty; may the "vineyard" be cultivated; may the "fisherman" cast his nets; may the high priest love his "precious pearls", his parishioners.

*In manus.*

Father Ivano