

that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 273).

I would like to relate this closeness to the people of God with closeness to God, since the prayer of a shepherd is nurtured and becomes incarnate in the heart of God’s people. When he prays, a pastor bears the marks of the sorrows and joys of his people, which he presents in silence to the Lord, to be anointed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Such is the hope of every shepherd who trustingly and tirelessly works so that the Lord may bless his people.

Saint Ignatius teaches that “it is not knowing much but realizing and relishing things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul” (*Spiritual Exercises*, Annotations, 2, 4). Bishops and priests would do well to ask, “How am I practicing these forms of closeness? How am I living these four aspects that intersect and shape my priestly heart, enabling me to deal with the tensions and imbalances that we experience daily?” Those four forms of closeness are good training for “playing on an open field,” where the priest is called to be present without fear or rigidity, without reducing or impoverishing his mission.

A priestly heart knows about closeness, because his primary form of closeness is with the Lord. May Christ visit his priests in their prayer, in their Bishop, in their brother priests and in their people. May he upset our routine, disrupt our lives and disquiet us – as at the time of our first love – and lead us to employ all our talents and abilities to ensure that our people may have life and life in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10). The forms of closeness that the Lord demands – closeness with God, closeness with the Bishop, closeness among us priests and closeness with the holy faithful People of God – are not an added burden: they are a gift that he gives to keep our vocation alive and fruitful. If we are tempted to get caught up in interminable speeches, discussions about the theology of the priesthood or theories about what the priesthood should be, the Lord for his part simply looks upon us with tenderness and compassion. He shows priests the signposts that point the way to appreciating and rekindling their missionary zeal: closeness that is compassionate and tender, closeness to God, to the Bishop, to brother priests and to the people entrusted to their care. A closeness in the “style” of God himself, who is ever close to us, with compassion and tender love.

Thank you for your closeness and patience, thank you, thank you very much! I wish all of you well in your work. I am going to the library because I have many appointments this morning. Please pray for me and I will pray for you. I wish you all good work!

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Promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium (March 19, 2022)

The full text of the document can be found at: <http://bitly.ws/Amnu>. We reproduce the information from Vatican News on its presentation to the press.

Church leaders and experts involved in the work on the new Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia presented *Praedicate Evangelium* to journalists on hand both at the Holy See Press Office, as well as those watching online during a two and half hour press conference.

The text of the document was released just two days earlier, on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, when Pope Francis had the Apostolic Constitution promulgated.

Missionary dimension

Among the presenters at the Press Conference, Bishop Marco Mellino, Secretary of the Council of Cardinals, noted that the title itself of the document, *Praedicate Evangelium*, underscores the missionary dimension and core duty of evangelization, proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel, which regards all the offices assisting the Pope in his pastoral ministry.

He also pointed out how the Roman Curia is by its nature at the service of the universal Church and under the direction of the Pope assisting him carry out his universal pastoral mission throughout the world.

He also noted how the concept of synodality enters into the equation now, as the Roman Curia becomes increasingly instrumental in listening and dialoguing with the particular Churches as it carries out its service.

Ecclesia semper reformanda

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and over these years assisting Pope Francis and the Cardinals in preparing the document, gave an overview and historical context surrounding it.

The new Apostolic Constitution will replace the current one governing the Roman Curia, *Pastor Bonus*, promulgated back on 28 June 1988 by Pope Saint John Paul II. The new Constitution will come into force on 5 June 2022, the Solemnity of Pentecost.

Cardinal Semeraro noted how *Praedicate Evangelium*, many years in the making from discussions going back to the conclave of 2013, brings to completion the reform of the Roman Curia.

Many of the reforms have already been implemented in recent years, even before the new Constitution was finalized, although all the offices of the Roman Curia will need to assure their current statutes are fully in line with the final indications set in the Apostolic Constitution.

Innovation and reforms

Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, a Canon lawyer and emeritus professor of the Pontifical Gregorian University, offered his input on the document.

He noted areas of innovation, including the increasingly important role of the laity in

the Roman Curia and the possibility they have to hold positions of authority and governance, while at the same time acknowledging responsibilities where Holy Orders are required.

Fr. Ghirlanda also looked at how the role and authority of Bishops Conferences around the world in exercising their authority. And he spoke of how the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has been given special importance and prominence with its placement under the responsibility of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

He also described the reforms and reorganization of offices regarding the economic and financial areas of the Holy See, in order to bring them up to the latest standards and meet current needs.

In conclusion, he noted beneath all these reforms is an emphasis on "interior reform," which means assuring the proper interior disposition of all those serving in the Roman Curia by focusing greater attention to personal, ongoing conversion, which is not just a matter for structures *semper reformanda* - continually renewed - but first regarding persons.

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Homily at the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

In the Gospel reading for today's Solemnity, the angel Gabriel speaks *three times* in addressing the Virgin Mary.

The first is when he greets her and says, "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). The reason to rejoice, the reason for joy, is revealed in those few words: *the Lord is with you*. Dear brother, dear sister, today you can hear those words addressed to you. You can make them your own each time you approach God's forgiveness, for there the Lord tells you, "I am with you." All too often, we think that Confession is about going to God with dejected looks. Yet it is not so much that we go to the Lord, but that he comes to us, to fill us with his grace, to fill us with his joy. Our confession gives the Father the joy of raising us up once more. It is not so much about our sins as about his forgiveness. Our sins are present but the forgiveness of God is always at the heart of our confession. Think about it: if our sins were at the heart of the sacrament, almost everything would depend on us, on our repentance, our efforts, our resolves. Far from it. The sacrament is about God, who liberates us and puts us back on our feet.

Let us recognize once more *the primacy of grace* and ask for the gift to realize that Reconciliation is not primarily our drawing near to God, but his embrace that enfolds, astonishes and overwhelms us. The Lord enters our home, as he did that of Mary in Nazareth, and brings us unexpected amazement and joy - the joy of forgiveness. Let us first look at things from God's perspective: then we will rediscover our love for Confession. We need this, for every interior rebirth, every spiritual renewal, starts there, from God's forgiveness. May we not neglect Reconciliation, but rediscover it as *the sacrament of joy*.