



Statement of Cardinal Law regarding the letter released 3/21/2002 from The Holy Father

Statement of His Eminence, Bernard Cardinal Law March 21, 2002 regarding the letter released today from The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, customarily addresses a letter to the priests of the world to mark Holy Thursday, when the Mass of the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The Mass of Chrism, properly concelebrated by the bishop with his brother priests as a sign of their unity and communion, is customarily scheduled for the morning of Holy Thursday. To make it easier for priests to participate, the Chrism Mass is often anticipated during Holy Week; in Boston, the Chrism Mass is scheduled at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Tuesday, March 26, at eleven in the morning.

The theme of the Holy Father's ten page letter to priests this year is set forth clearly in his own words: "I would like this year to speak to you about an aspect of our mission to which I called your attention last year at this time. I believe that it warrants further reflection. I mean the mission that the Lord has given us to represent him not just in the Eucharistic Sacrifice but also in the Sacrament of Reconciliation."

The Holy Father uses the encounter of Jesus with Zacchaeus as the framework for a moving and instructive meditation on the priest and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In one paragraph, the Holy Father addresses the "grave scandal" caused by "our brothers who have betrayed the grace of Ordination in succumbing even to the most grievous forms of the mystery of iniquity at work in the world." He speaks of "a dark shadow of suspicion" which "is cast over all other fine priests who perform their ministry with honesty and integrity and often with heroic sacrifice."

He goes on to say: "As the Church shows her concern for the victims and strives to respond in truth and justice to each of these painful situations, all of us-conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace-are called to embrace the "mysterium Crucis" and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness. We must beg God in his Providence to prompt a whole-hearted reawakening of those ideals of total self-giving to Christ which are the very foundation of the priestly ministry."

I am most grateful to the Holy Father for this reflection on the Priest as minister of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and for the sensitive and helpful way he addresses the situation that has so absorbed us.

+Bernard Cardinal Law
Archbishop of Boston
March 21, 2002

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