

Pope consecrates world's priests to Mary

John L. Allen Jr. | May. 12, 2010 NCR Today

By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.

Fatima, Portugal

As part of a Vatican-decreed "Year for Priests," Pope Benedict XVI formally consecrated the roughly 400,000 Catholic priests of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, during a ceremony in the famous Marian shrine of Fatima, Portugal.

Benedict XVI arrived in Fatima late this afternoon, making his first stop at an outdoor shrine where the statue of Our Lady of Fatima is kept under glass. Benedict recited a prayer, among other things thanking Mary for interceding on May 13, 1981 — the feast of Our Lady of Fatima — to save Pope John Paul II's life after the assassination attempt that day in St. Peter's Square. Benedict recalled that one year later, John Paul traveled to Fatima to place the bullet doctors removed from his body in the crown on the statue.

"It is a profound consolation to know that you are crowned not only with the silver and gold of our joys and hopes, but also with the 'bullet' of our anxieties and sufferings," the pope said.

Later, Benedict presided over a vespers service in the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Fatima, formally consecrating the world's priests to Mary's care.

Benedict prayed that just as Christ was born through Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit would also allow Christ to be "born" in priests who minister in his name. In that way, the pope said, the church could be renewed by "holy priests."

In a line in which some may hear a partial echo of the sexual abuse crisis, the pope asked Mary to help priests "not give in to our egoisms, to the temptations of the world and to the suggestions of the Evil One."

(In a footnote that amounts to a bit of inside theological baseball, Benedict XVI referred to Mary as "mediatrix of grace" but not "of all grace," a title which some Marian devotees have petitioned the Vatican to adopt, often alongside the term "Coredemptrix.")

During his homily at the vespers service, Benedict called priests to fidelity — describing fidelity over time as "the name of love, a coherent, true and deep love of Christ the Priest."

Benedict cited John Paul II to the effect that priests should not content themselves with "a mediocre life, lived in the grip of a minimalist ethic and a superficial religiosity."

Benedict XVI offered St. John Vianney, the famed Curé d'Ars in 18th/19th century France, as a model for priestly life. The pope especially praised Vianney's gentle touch, saying that he "preferred to emphasize the fascinating appeal of virtue, and the mercy of God with respect to which our sins are 'grains of sand.'"

Benedict also warned priests against "situations of a certain weakening of priestly ideals, as well as dedicating

oneself to activities that are not integrally consistent with that which is proper to a minister of Jesus Christ.?

tThough Benedict's focus was almost certainly much broader, some may nonetheless be tempted to hear echoes of the sexual abuse crisis in that remark.

tThe pope also called upon priests to support one another, imploring a brotherly attitude of 'helping one's brother to stay on his feet.'

tIn early June, the Vatican will sponsor an international gathering of priests in Rome as a highlight of the 'Year of Priests.' On June 11, Benedict will celebrate a Mass with the priests in St. Peter's Square, and some have speculated that the pope might use that occasion to deliver another high-profile apology for the crisis, as well as to address its impact on priestly morale.

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