Letter from the Superior General
to the members and the faithful
of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X,
for the 50th anniversary of its foundation

“THE OBJECTIVE, THE ULTIMATE RAISON D’ÊTRE
OF ALL OUR BATTLES, IS THE LIFE OF AN INTIMATE
UNION WITH OUR BLESSED LORD, KING”

Dear members and faithful of the Society of Saint Pius X,

It is a great joy for me to write to you at this very special moment in the history of our Society as we celebrate its Golden Jubilee.

This 50th anniversary of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X is first and foremost an opportunity for a real and profound act of thanksgiving. Firstly, towards God, who never ceases to support us and strengthen us in spite of our trials and who fortifies us throughout these difficulties. If crosses have never been lacking during this past half-century of our history, we must see in them the proof of a very special benevolence of Divine Providence, who permits evil only for the establishment of His reign and for the sanctification of His faithful servants. Thanksgiving also to our founder, who knew how to transmit to us the most precious treasures of the Catholic Church, with the burning flame of a fearless charity, enlightened by a deep faith and sustained by an unfailing hope in the charity of God Himself: “credimus caritate”.

This 50th anniversary also invites us to take stock of our situation today. Is the flame received from our founder still very much alive? Exposed to all the winds of a crisis that is prolonged indefinitely, in the Church and in society as a whole, is this precious torch not in danger of faltering and weakening?

On the one hand, battles of all kinds, which persist and whose end is nowhere in sight, are likely to fatigue us: is it really necessary to continue to fight? And on the other hand, after fifty years of fighting, the Society of Saint Pius X can feel that it is quite comfortably settled and can enjoy a relative peace. But such a settled and peaceful situation, are they not also a danger to us? This flame, which we in turn have to transmit to those who follow us, is there not a need to revive it?

It is not superfluous to verify that we always keep in mind the raison d’être of our Society, that we pursue its true goal, in making good use of the means at our disposal to achieve it. This is even indispensable if we want to be able to continue the momentum of these first fifty years.
1. Must the Society be militant?

The providential circumstances in which God raised up the SSPX, which are those of the terrible crisis into which the Catholic Church has been plunged for sixty years, have obliged us to take a very special place in what has become a real battle. We could say that, being militant is a bit of a characteristic of the Society. From the beginning, it has had to combat against the enemies of the Church with faith, courage and perseverance. However, we must not be mistaken about the profound nature of this struggle which, if we think about it carefully, is neither exceptional nor original. For it is in the nature of the Church, upon this earth, to be militant. The Society is part of the Catholic Church and therefore necessarily militant.

What is our fight? From the very beginning, it was, and certainly still is today, the fight for the preservation of the priesthood; and in addition to it, the fight for the Mass and for the preservation of the liturgy. It is also unquestionably the battle to preserve the faith and to defend Catholic doctrine, which is tragically threatened, even in Rome itself, by the galloping apostasy of this century. Finally, and almost as a resume, it is the struggle in favour of Christ the King, for His reign in souls and over nations.

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"WE MUST NOT BE MISTAKEN ABOUT THE NATURE OF OUR STRUGGLE"

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But we must clearly understand what that means... and not stop short, along the way. What is the true scope of the battles that we have mentioned? What is the central reason for fighting for the Mass and for the Catholic priesthood? Why are we combatting for our faith and for Christ the King? It is this reality which is the objective of the whole Church, and the ultimate raison d’être of all its battles throughout its history: it is the spiritual life, the life of an intimate union with Our Blessed Lord, King.

The Society must bear this in mind: the development of the spiritual life in our souls is the real reason for its providential existence. Thus, it is only part of a struggle that is greater than itself, one that surpasses it, and which is truly the battle of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of His Church, from the beginning: “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). If we are part of this great battle, and if, in our place, we fight, it is ultimately to unite ourselves with Our Blessed Lord. It is His Kingdom! And this is not an abstract idea: it is a very concrete, genuine and intimate union with Him. It is a life!

Archbishop Lefebvre insisted magnificently on this point: “Our entire Society is at the service of this King: it knows no other. All its thoughts, love and activities are for Him, for His reign, for His glory and for the completion of His redemptive work on earth! We have no other goal, no other reason for being priests, other than to facilitate the reign of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and in doing so, we bring the spiritual life to souls.”

In contrast, if by habit or weariness we weaken in this combat for a spiritual life of union with Our Blessed Lord, then not only are we less available for the essential battle, but we also lose sight of the raison d’être of the fight we courageously wish to wage for the Mass, the priesthood, for Catholic doctrine and for Christ the King.

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1 Cor Unum, “Letter to the members of the Society”, Christmas 1977
2 Spiritual Conference, Ecône, February 29th, 1980
2. What is the spiritual life?

The spiritual life is nothing less than the life of our soul, for which God created us, and which will make us happy for all eternity: it is eternal life, beginning already here on this earth. Now, what definition does Our Lord Himself give of this life? “Eternal life, it is that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) The spiritual life therefore consists in knowing God, in knowing Our Lord Jesus Christ: His person, His divinity, His virtues and the salvation that He brings to us. To know Him in order to imitate Him, and thus to attain salvation.

This is not the purely speculative knowledge of the scientists or the experts in biblical theology. It is a supernatural knowledge, by faith and grace, of Him Who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). A knowledge that will be the foundation of this life to blossom, in deep intimacy with Our Blessed Lord, in ardent charity: “To believe is not only to give one’s spirit to the truth, it is to surrender one’s whole soul and being, to the one who speaks it... and who is that truth. To believe is to live... and this life is Life itself: «Believe in Me, said Jesus, whoever believes in Me has eternal life».”

In this way, the soul is always increasingly delighted by the love of the One who has become everything for it. The more it knows Him, the more it loves Him; and the more it loves Him, the more it progresses in its knowledge of Him. Faith and charity mutually nourish each other, and the soul is thus transformed to become ever more like its divine model.

The soul then frees itself from the chains that hinder its journey towards salvation. Since original sin, fallen man tends to relate everything to himself. He knows only himself, is interested only in himself, lives as if withdrawn into himself... to the point of forgetting God. However, when God, through baptism, inaugurates in this man His work of salvation, giving him this knowledge of faith and works by His grace to make him like Himself, man begins to relate everything back to Christ. Soon he knows only Him, lives by Him and is centred on Him... to the point of forgetting himself. This is the Christian ideal, per se. It allows us to overcome all obstacles, to the point where Our Blessed Lord is truly the life of a soul completely filled by Him. It is the true and definitive liberty, realised by the One who is Eternal Truth.

“OUR BLESSED LORD WANTS TO COMMUNICATE HIMSELF TO ALL AND IT IS TO RECEIVE THIS GIFT THAT WE HAVE BEEN CREATED.”

Now, in Heaven, in eternal life, Our Blessed Lord will completely fill our soul and truly become our all, like for the countless number of angels and saints. And since eternal life begins here on earth with the spiritual life, then it is not surprising that our Saviour already wants to gradually take up all the space in our soul.

Obviously, we do not yet see God on this earth, but in heaven, we will see him face to face. Our faith is not an absolutely perfect knowledge of God. But the charity by which we will be eternally united to Him is no different from the charity with which we already love Him on this earth. Furthermore, He already becomes our all, when we truly love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind, to the point of the total offering of ourselves to Him.

It would be wrong to believe that this wonderful life is accessible only to a spiritual elite. Our Blessed Lord wants to communicate Himself to all. This ever more loving knowledge of the Incarnate Word is simply the development of the gift of understanding received by all those who are baptised and confirmed. And it is to receive this gift and to live with it, that we have been created.

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3. The necessary means for this spiritual life

But how is this knowledge of faith communicated to us? By what means does it blossom into a life of charity, to make us Christ-like? It is through the sacraments and through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is through these channels of grace, which enable Our Lord Jesus Christ to incorporate us into Him.

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“TO ALLOW OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST TO BE THE AXIS
OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR THOUGHTS,
ALL OUR WORDS AND ALL OUR ACTIONS”

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By grace, Our Blessed Lord lives in us and makes us live in Him. The more this grace grows in us, the more our life of intimacy with Him takes up all the space in our soul, so that nothing can separate us from Him. This is the spirituality of the Gospel. This ideal perfectly unifies the life of a Christian, because he is united to the person of Our Blessed Lord. The Son of God has become the axis of his life, around which all his concerns and all his actions revolve. He has become one with Him. It is indeed Our Blessed Lord who is the principle of his inner unity.

So this is our combat: to allow Our Lord Jesus Christ to be the axis of our spiritual life, the source of all our thoughts, all our words and all our actions. This is also why we fight for the Mass: so that our souls may be sanctified by grace. This is why we fight for the faith: so that souls may know their Saviour, so that they can love Him and serve Him better. And this is why we fight for the reign of Jesus Christ: so that souls may serve Him and be perfectly united to their King.

This is truly the spirit of the crusade that our founder launched in 1979, on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee to the priesthood, drawing upon his long missionary experience. "It is necessary that we study somewhat the profound motive of this transformation [of pagans into Christians]: it is a question of sacrifice. [...] We should have a crusade! A crusade based upon the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, on the Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, on that invincible rock, that inexhaustible source of grace, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in order to recreate Christianity. And you will see a Christian civilisation blossom again, a civilisation that is not for this world, but a civilisation that leads to the Catholic City, which is heaven." This crusade is indeed ours: to fight spiritually, supported by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, so that the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ may be communicated to souls and to society as a whole.

On the other hand, what happens when this combat in favour of the spiritual life ceases?

4. Modern man abandoned to himself and without reference points

To answer this question, all we have to do is to look at modern man. We are struck by the lack of unity that characterises his life. He no longer knows who he is, where he comes from or where he is going. He no longer has any reference points. He is disoriented, torn apart and divided within himself. If faith is not totally lacking in his life, it is only a small part of it, and it is no longer the centre of his life. Modern man absolutely wants to benefit from a free and independent domain. He wants to be able to enjoy a space in which he is accountable to no one, not even to God.

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4 Sermon of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, Porte de Versailles (France), September 23rd, 1979.
Thus, for example, we see modern science claiming to be able to assert itself, without being judged by faith, and pushing its boldness to judging faith itself. We see modern education and modern morality freeing itself from all principles, seeking freely the objectives it desires, resulting in the most chaotic disharmony. We see secularist politics absolutely banishing faith and the supernatural from all social life.

“OUR BLESSED LORD IS PERHAPS STILL A SMALL PART OF MODERN MAN’S LIFE... BUT HE IS NO LONGER THE CENTRE OF HIS LIFE.”

These seeds of apostasy, through which Our Blessed Lord finds Himself, in practice, eliminated from the lives of men, and this absence of moral principles, leading to disintegration and chaos, inevitably make any unified, simple spiritual life, centred on Our Lord Jesus Christ, absolutely impossible. It is the insolent and provocative emancipation of the Kingship of Christ. It is the contemptuous refusal of His royal demands on individuals and on societies. Our Blessed Lord is perhaps still a small part of modern man’s life... but He is no longer the centre of his life. He no longer has total influence over this man. He is no longer the basis of all his activities... The perfect union of this man with Our Lord Jesus Christ thus becomes impossible.

5. The root of the crisis in the Church: its opening to the world and to the spirit of the world

However, what makes the crisis in which we find ourselves dramatic today is that the Church, for the past sixty years, has chosen to welcome this modern ideal and to enter into this conception of a universe in which Our Blessed Lord has only a limited place. His universal royalty is no longer recognised, since the Church has become the champion of religious freedom: by recognising the human person as an autonomous domain; by recognising each person’s rights to live according to one’s individual conscience - without constraint; and the ecclesiastical hierarchy has come to the point of effectively denying the rights of Our Lord Jesus Christ over the human person.

“IT HAS BECOME ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE IN TODAY’S CHURCH TO KNOW OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST FULLY AND TRULY AND TO LIVE THE SPIRITUAL LIFE THAT FLOWS FROM IT.”

In fact, not only Our Blessed Lord’s royalty but His very divinity has been called into question, because the Church decided to recognise that man, in the name of his supposed dignity, is free to choose or refuse Our Blessed Lord. In doing so, the Church’s hierarchy have silenced our Divine Saviour Himself who said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”. (John 14:6) They even make Saint Peter lie, when he proclaimed that: “neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Therefore, without prejudging the personal graces that God remains free to give to anyone, it has become almost impossible in today’s Church to know Our Lord Jesus Christ fully and truly, to know His divinity, His kingship with all His privileges, and the salvation that He brings us. It has therefore become, in practice, very difficult to live the spiritual life that flows from it. This shows the seriousness of the crisis in which we find ourselves immersed! It is not only the Mass, the sacraments and the faith which are in danger. Through all this, it is also the life of union with Our Blessed Lord, that all these
means are intended to procure for us, which is in danger. It is the finality of the Church, the ultimate goal of Christian life which is tragically compromised.

Our founder made note of this with great sadness: “They no longer transmit Our Lord Jesus Christ, but a sentimental, superficial and charismatic religiosity. [...] This new religion is not the Catholic religion. It is sterile and incapable of sanctifying society and the family.”

6. The blunted sword of the gospel

How could the Catholic Church come to this catastrophic situation? How is it possible that such an about turn could have taken place, that such ideas could have been conceived in the Church, in opposition to the doctrine and faith of all times?

Alas! It is for a very simple reason. This spiritual life of which we have spoken is the cause of a fight. This battle, which is that of each soul in particular wanting to develop the reign of Jesus Christ in it, is also, and first and foremost, the battle of the whole Catholic Church. It is a general conflict in which the Church and the world are in direct confrontation, and what is at stake, precisely, is this union of souls with Jesus Christ. This battle is difficult, arduous and continuous. It started at the very beginning of the Church, at the first Pentecost, and will last as long as this world lasts. There is therefore, in addition to the difficulties inherent in this conflict, a special difficulty which is that of its duration. Quite simply, we have grown weary. Little by little, this ideal of spiritual life, with all its demands, has faded away. More and more Catholics found it too hard to continue fighting. They hesitated when called to surrender themselves totally to Our Blessed Lord’s grace, so that it may transform them and save them. They no longer wanted His reign and the constraints of His love for them. They became tired of always having to resist the seductions of this world, which conspires day and night against the establishment of this reign of Jesus Christ in their souls. They have silenced Saint Paul who warned them: “And be not conformed to this world”. (Rom. 12:2) And finally, they became discouraged. In the face of the world’s continual aggressions, many Catholics have unfortunately shown a culpable weakness. Their Catholicism has become timid, conciliatory, falling into line with the Second Vatican Council, liberal and mundane. Their way of life has become worldly. Sacrifice, that profound characteristic of every authentic Christian life, has been banished.

“TO HAVE NO MORE ENEMIES, THEY PREFERRED TO REJECT JESUS CHRIST AND WORK WITHOUT HIM FOR A FOUNDATIONLESS PEACE.”

The doctrinal justifications soon came to reinforce this sluggishness and fatigue: “No more war!” And people began to believe in a worldly peace, in a universal harmony among all believers, in the fantasy of a Catholicism reconciled with the world. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” said Our Blessed Lord, but He added: “not as the world giveth, do I give it unto you.” (John 14:27) However, to have no more enemies, they preferred to reject His offer and work without Him for a foundationless peace. Regardless of whether He likes it or not: it is easier, less demanding and more comfortable to please the world.

Since the Christian ideal of union with Our Lord Jesus Christ is thus becoming increasingly difficult to live, in a disfigured Church that is abandoning and ignoring it more and more, it is essential to understand that it is at this level that the Society, today as yesterday, has the duty to fight, whatever the cost.

However, this danger of abandoning Our Blessed Lord to conform to the world has always existed, ever since the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Saviour’s most faithful friends found themselves confronted with this problem. This fight for fidelity is challenged every day. Therefore, can we say that the Society remains faithful?

7. Is the Society totally immune?

It is a real danger for us, after fifty years of expansion, to believe that, since the Society is now well established, Tradition can be maintained more easily and more comfortably preserved. Thus Catholic life is easier today and less demanding. Nothing could be further from the truth! The obligations of a spiritual life, of an interior life, of a life of union with Jesus Christ, call for a daily combat and a generous struggle against the seductive temptation to compromise ourselves with the world.

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, in his Jubilee sermon, in 1979, told us that: “The notion of sacrifice is a profoundly Christian and a profoundly Catholic notion. Our life cannot be spent without sacrifice, since Our Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself, willed to take a body like our own and say to us: «Follow Me, take up thy cross and follow Me if thou wilt be saved»”.

It is also a danger, after fifty years of fighting, to allow oneself to be overcome by this weariness and discouragement, which has led souls to gradually lose the meaning of the Christian life, and to no longer see the profound reasons that motivated their first efforts, which are still necessary.

It is therefore fundamental that this truly Catholic life remains our constant goal, and that we do everything in our power, every day, with the help of God’s grace, to make this life of charity with Our Blessed Lord possible. We must allow our Divine Saviour to conquer our souls, by removing all obstacles that prevent the establishment of His reign in us. This daily spiritual combat, sustained by a supernatural hope, is indispensable if we truly desire to remain faithful to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Only then will He truly live in us, and we will be for Him another humanity, in whom He can freely give His Father the honour and glory due to Him.

“AS LONG AS THIS IDEAL OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE REMAINS DEEPLY OURS, OUR FIDELITY TO THE COMBAT FOR TRADITION WILL BE GUARANTEED.”

If we fail to give our combat this profound spiritual dimension, we risk leading a purely abstract struggle. Our doctrinal battles will be nothing more than intellectual, speculative and disembodied games: ideas confronting ideas, without any moral life being illuminated by the clarity of our faith. Our fight for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will become aesthetic. We will defend the traditional liturgy for the simple reason that it is more beautiful or more prayerful. This may be true— but that is not why we defend it! One must look deeper. We defend it because it is the means par excellence of making known to men the love of Our Blessed Lord at the altar. The means par excellence of entering fully into the same love and the same sacrifice, through adoration and the gift of self. This is the ultimate reason for the fight for the Mass— and it is the true meaning of the word “Tradition”!

As long as this ideal of the spiritual life remains deeply ours, and as long as we allow God’s grace to transform us day by day into the likeness of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our fidelity to the combat for Tradition will be guaranteed and invigorated. It is this ideal, embodied in a life truly animated by this spirit, which will guarantee the members and the faithful of the Society of Saint Pius X, the strength and vitality necessary for their faithfulness in the service of Christ the King.
8. How do we prepare for the final victory?

How long will this crisis in the Church last? More importantly, why does God allow it to continue? What does He expect of us? We have explained everything about the harmfulness of the New Mass. We have revealed all the errors of religious liberty and ecumenism, etc. So what remains to be done? What is lacking, for Tradition to be honoured once more in the Catholic Church?

There is nothing new left to say, speculatively speaking. Even if it is obvious that we must not remain silent but continue to speak, in preaching the truth and in denouncing the errors of the Second Vatican Council. But on the other hand, there is still something to be given, in reality. This is the fundamental battle. This situation, with all its difficulties, requires each of us to make an effort to offer Our Blessed Lord something more profound, something more radical, than what we have given to Him up to now: it is the unconditional gift of ourselves.

This is precisely what Our Lord Jesus Christ asks of us, and it is to obtain it, that he allows this crisis to continue. In His goodness, he is granting us more time. Not to tire us out, nor to gentrify us. But so that we can give ourselves more generously to Him. The good Lord uses this time, so that we can surrender ourselves even more to His Divine Providence and to His love. After all, since this battle is His, the hour of victory belongs to Him! For us, let us be faithful for as long as it pleases Him to test us. The crisis is necessary to provoke in Our Blessed Lord’s friends a more virtuous and heroic reaction to the attacks of His enemies. It is necessary to arouse souls, whom the trial will make more generous, more open and more docile to the conquests of His grace. In a word, to make them holier.

And then, the flame that we want to transmit to those who will continue His fight after us, will flare up again, alive and well.

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“THIS SITUATION REQUIRES US TO MAKE AN EFFORT TO OFFER
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THAN WHAT WE HAVE GIVEN TO HIM UP TO NOW.”

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It is to this generosity that I encourage you. Through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through the fervent reception of the sacraments, especially the Blessed Eucharist, through the spirit of sacrifice and through devout prayer, may the knowledge and love of the Incarnate Word grow in our souls! May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ sustain us in our spiritual combat and transform us into His image! May our souls become one with Him and may we say, as Saint Paul said: “I count all things to be but lost for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ and count them as dung, that I may gain Christ. And that I may be found in Him, not having my justice, but that which is of the faith of Jesus Christ. That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.” (Phil. 3:8-10)

These few words of Saint Paul sum up perfectly the most precious thing that Archbishop Lefebvre bequeathed to us: “the deep and immutable spirit of the Catholic priesthood and of the Christian spirit, linked essentially to the great prayer of Our Blessed Lord, eternally expressed in His Sacrifice of the Cross”.

That is all I could wish for you, because nothing else really matters.

May God bless you!

Menzingen, All Saints’ Day 2020
Don Davide Pagliarani, Superior general

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6 Spiritual Journey, Ed. Iris, 2010, pp. 7-8