

POPE DECLARES YEAR OF THE PRIEST TO INSPIRE SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Vianney, Benedict XVI is proclaiming a year for priests. Why? To encourage all priests to seek holiness ...

• BY INSIDE THE VATICAN STAFF

St. John Vianney (photo insert) will be proclaimed patron saint of all the world's priests

Pope Benedict XVI has declared a year of the priest in an effort to encourage "spiritual perfection" in priests.

The Pope will open the special year with a vespers service at the Vatican June 19 - the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the day for the sanctification of priests.

He will close the celebrations during a World Meeting of Priests in St. Peter's Square June 19, 2010.

The Pope made the announcement during a March 16 audience with members of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy.

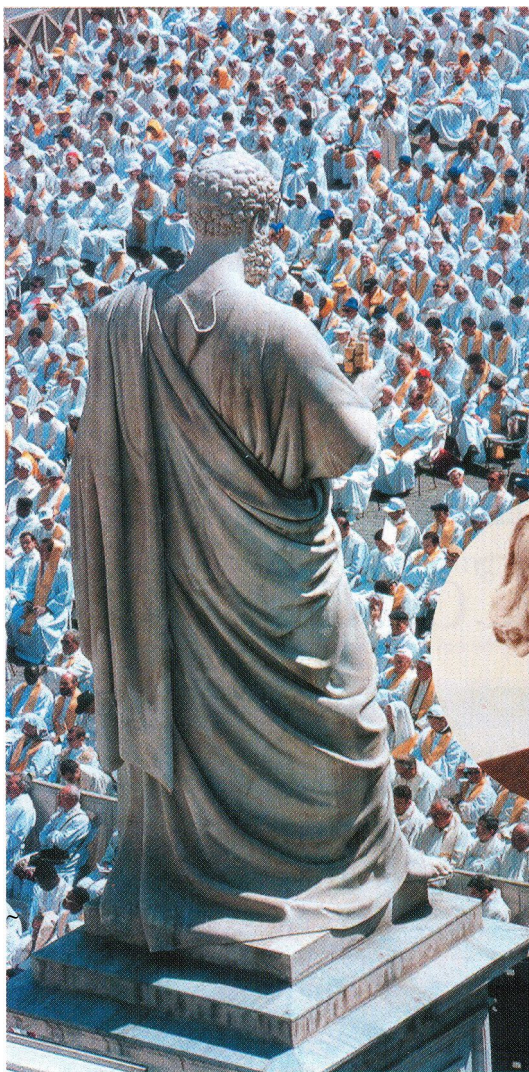
He met with some 70 participants of the congregation's March 16-18 plenary assembly, which focused on the missionary identity of the priest and his mission to sanctify, teach and govern.

During this jubilee year, the Pope will also proclaim St. John Vianney the patron saint of all the world's priests. At present, he is considered the patron saint of parish priests.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the death of this 19th-century saint who represents a "true example of a priest at the service of the flock of Christ," the Pope said.

St. John Vianney is widely known to Catholics as the Cure (parish priest) of Ars who won over the hearts of his villagers in France by visiting with them, teaching them about God and reconciling people to the Lord in the confessional.

In his address, Pope Benedict said the priestly ministry consists of total adherence to the ecclesial tradition of participating "in a spiritually intense new life and a new lifestyle which was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus and which the apostles



made their own."

Priestly ordination creates new men who are endowed with the gift and office of sanctifying, teaching and governing, he said.

The Pope emphasized the necessary and "indispensable struggle for moral perfection which must dwell in every authentic priestly heart."

The Pope said he was calling for the special year for priests in an effort to fos-

ter the priests' yearning "for spiritual perfection, upon which the effectiveness of their ministry principally depends."

"The awareness of the radical social changes over the past decades must stir the best ecclesial energies to look after the formation of priestly candidates," the Pope said.

This means great care must be taken to ensure permanent and consistent doctrinal and spiritual formation for seminarians and priests, he said, specifying the importance of passing down, especially to younger generations, "a correct reading of the texts of the Second Vatican Council, interpreted in the light of all the Church's doctrinal heritage."

Priests must also be "present, identifiable and recognizable - for their judgment of faith, their personal virtues and their attire - in the fields of culture and charity which have always been at the heart of the Church's mission," he said. "The centrality of Christ leads to a correct valuation of ordained ministry," he said, adding that, without priestly ministry, there would be no Eucharist, no mission and even no Church.

Therefore, he said, it is crucial to make sure that new bodies or pastoral organizations are not set up "for a time in which one might have to 'dispense with' ordained ministry based on an erroneous interpretation of the rightful promotion of the laity."

"This would lay the foundations for further diluting the priestly ministry, and any supposed 'solutions' would dramatically coincide with the real causes of the problems currently connected with the ministry," he said. ○