

DISTRICT OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Society of Saint Pius X

Saint Mary's House

13 William Street

Rockdale NSW 2216



14 March 2025

Dear Friends,

The season of Lent is given to us each year by God and the Church that we might be interrupted in the course of our usual thoughts and activities and give real attention to reforming our life. Of course, as adopted children of a divine Father, it would be quite normal that we always have in mind our supernatural identities and our personal missions as members of Jesus Christ. But, because of our weakness and because of those faults we have never quite made up our minds to fight, we tend to be rather abnormal. We easily focus our time and energy on things which have only secondary importance (or perhaps not even so much importance as that). To a greater or lesser extent, we fashion an artificial identity for ourselves as if there were nothing more to us than being a man or woman with this career, these relatives, this address, and these interests.

The truth is much larger, much more beautiful, and much more inspiring than this. We are people with an eternal destiny and with a work to do which has eternal consequences. Each one has a mission in life that will not be given to another as long as the world lasts. To remind us of this and to refocus our attention on this, the season of Lent is given to us.

Fr Joseph Guibert S.J. taught a course on the spiritual life to seminarians in Rome until his death in 1942. He wrote "*self-knowledge is necessary for any serious reformation of life, for avoiding dangerous illusions, and for a solid grounding in humility.*" The daily experience of priests bears out the truth of these words. Priests see souls who weary themselves fighting faults they do not even have, but who seem oblivious to faults which all the world can see in them. There are others who, in the words of Our Lord, "*strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.*" They might scrupulously avoid uncharitable words while they act in a terribly uncharitable way by leaving their children unprotected against the impurities of the internet. Or they might make Herculean efforts to concentrate at their prayers but make no effort at all to overcome a grudge that is poisoning a relationship which God wants to be healthy. Fr Guibert continues, "*Therefore, from the very beginning, souls should set about acquiring a general knowledge of their character ... They should learn to recognize the more obvious manifestations of their main defects and in particular the external manifestations of these defects.*"

In the life of the average person, there are one or two things which lie near at hand which, if they were changed, would bring immediate and significant benefits. During Lent, this season of grace and conversion, we need to search for these things with confidence – confidence that the grace to change them will be given us and confidence that the benefits will follow. But we must pray for *self-knowledge* in order to find these opportunities. Besides prayer, we must be humble enough to listen to those who know us well. Often, they see us more clearly than we see ourselves. "*Without humility, a man can find out nothing about himself. Without humility, he will dramatize and idealize himself until there is nothing of his real self left,*" (Dom van Zeller). Let us make up our minds now to be generous. God already knows us. If we try to hide from

ourselves, the only result will be to disappoint the Sacred Heart Whose graces are waiting to gently bring us from where we *really are* to where we are really meant to be.

This question of self-knowledge, and knowing who we really are, raises another topic which I promised last December that I would write about this year.

The Superior General, Fr Pagliarani, has asked us to recover our focus on vocations. In the earliest days of Tradition, this focus was easy enough for it was a question of whether there would be any priests and religious at all to carry on the work of Tradition. Since then, we have become accustomed to seeing a steady, if not always abundant, flow of honest and generous people entering our seminaries and novitiates. And so, we have become accustomed to breathing a bit easier on this question – too easy in fact. Although there are many more priests, brothers, and sisters than there were a few decades ago, there are also larger parishes, more schools, more retreats, more camps, and more and more modern problems to be solved in these parishes, schools, retreats, and camps. Also, the traditional movement has reached an age when the first generation of vocations are beginning to pass away. Every year, we hear of more priests, sisters, and brothers who have gone to receive the rewards of their labours. Therefore, it is no longer true that every new vocation adds to the total number. Now there are ranks to be replenished before the numbers can increase.

Let this Lent be the beginning of our refocus on this question. Let young people be convinced that they have been created by God with a particular work to do. That is true of each one regardless of the state of life to which God calls them. It is not a question of whether or not God wants them to fulfill some personal mission for Him or not – that is a given – but only what form this mission is meant to take. In chapter 6 of his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us that we do not belong to ourselves for we have been bought with a great price. Let young people then begin to seriously reflect on this question for it is *not a reason for fear*. To find their true state of life is nothing more than to discover God's path to their true personal happiness *in this world*. Who would not wish to know that? And the fulfillment of their true vocation, whatever it may be, is linked to the happiness and welfare of many others. Let them not be daunted before the task of discerning the right path for God *wants* them to find it. Dom van Zeller assures us, "*It is not so difficult either to know or to be what God wants you to be, provided you do not want to be anything else. Once you have your own portrait of yourself as you desire, you leave no room for discovering, of being, your real self.*"

Parents, it is not for you to push your children towards one vocation or another. But it falls mostly to you to prepare them to find it and fulfill it. Please reflect seriously about the upbringing which you are providing them. You must form them to be *normal* but *noble*. You must impress upon them the *seriousness* and the *joy* of life. You must show them *real affection* but not allow them to become soft and self-focused. Perhaps most of all in these times, you must protect them from the dangers of the internet because now *it is easy to lose a priestly or religious vocation before the age of 12!* Ponder on these things during Lent. Seek advice. Do not allow Easter to find you in a state of culpable unawareness of your duties in these matters.

Please be assured of my prayers for all of you during this time of conversion when the graces of God surround us more abundantly.

In the Sacred Heart of our Saviour,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel Themann" followed by a small cross symbol.

Fr Daniel Themann
District Superior