

## Pastoral Letter for the Year for Priests from Bishop Li Jing Feng

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Feng Xiang (Agenzia Fides) - "Always keep this in mind: The Church is not a secular organization; priests are not mere lay functionaries!" These words are found in the Pastoral Letter for the Year for Priests, signed June 7, Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, by Bishop Li Jing Feng, Bishop of Feng Xiang. The Bishop is 87 years old and was one of the Chinese Bishops invited by Pope Benedict XVI to the XI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the theme: "The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church," held in October 2005.

The Letter, which includes a prayer that the priests can pray during the Year for Priests, presents a series of thoughtful and paternal recommendations: from spirituality (reading the Bible for at least a half-hour, daily spiritual commitments, learning to pray with the Psalms, leading community prayer, praying for the Pope's monthly missionary intentions), to personal discipline and study (one hour per day: translation of the New Testament; overview of the theology of the Sacraments of Matrimony and Confession; study of Canon Law: #469-502; 511-606; study of the Conciliar Documents: first and second chapters of LG, chapters 2,3,4,5, and 6 of SC, chapters 1,2, and 3 of PO, the first chapter of AA; 8 lessons of Latin).

The Bishop wants his priests to intensely live this Year for Priests declared by Pope Benedict XVI, taking advantage of the zeal that has arisen from the Year of St. Paul, "may every priest beat his chest like Paul" "may he reach full holiness." The Letter highlights the fact that "the Year for Priests is not merely a celebration, but a moment of reflection, awakening, formation and continual effort." "As the indulgence that the Holy Father has granted us specifically requires adoration, the Liturgy of the Hours, devout celebration of the Mass, pour out your heart and soul."

He then offers a list of what a priest's identity should be in Christ's Church, highlighting above all that it is Christ who calls. Priests are "mediators between God and mankind," "priests of the Lord," "lights for the People of God," "shepherds of the Lord's flock," "Servants of the Eucharist," "always seeking spiritual perfection," "alter Christus."

In his Letter, Bishop Li Jing Feng also mentions a series of the Pope's teachings on the four characteristics of the priestly mission: ecclesial, communion, hierarchical, and dogmatic. He also recalls the example of Saint John Mary Vianney on the priest's need to value the faith, virtue, his behavior, charity, and even the way he dresses, emphasizing the fact that he is a good shepherd. Bishop Li also offered examples of holy elderly priests for the younger priests to model themselves after, exhorting them by saying: "you have the authority from the Lord to forgive others' sins; what an honor!" (NZ) (Agenzia Fides 18/6/2009)