

## “CURA ANIMARUM” AND TRENT: CLERGY AND THE “CARE OF SOULS”

Some of you will surely remember **Msgr. Ambrose Hayden**, Cathedral rector from 1967-1993. He was a veritable wealth of wisdom, both practical and spiritual. He was also **encyclopedic** in his knowledge of this Archdiocese. And yet, the phrase he uttered that most stands out in my mind was a simple piece of **advice** to us new priests: “Say your prayers and be good to the people.” From one perspective, it is so obvious as to be almost tautological. By another view though, it is the simplest lessons that too often fall on deaf ears. As I wrap up my bulletin series on the Council of Trent, it may be helpful to focus on an area often overlooked amid its many vital **clarifications** about the sacraments, justification, the books of Scripture, etc. Trent’s Session XXIII includes a powerful teaching on the **pastoral** duties of the clergy. The degree to which its wisdom is heeded speaks volumes to the challenges we face in today’s Church.

On July 15, 1563, the Council approved several decrees touching on the nature of the **priesthood**. Trent enumerated what became known as the **minor orders**, steps to the priesthood: acolyte, exorcist, lector, and porter (doorkeeper). It classified the subdeacon as among the greater orders at the time, and it was as sub-deacon that a man made his promise of celibacy. Vatican II would change that, clarifying that one enters the **clerical state** with the reception of the diaconate. Trent decreed that ordination conferred a permanent, **not merely** temporary, ministry. It clarified: “the holy Synod with reason condemns the opinion of those, who assert that the priests of the New Testament have only a temporary power.” Trent defined Holy Orders as being one of the seven sacraments, basing its teaching upon the “unanimous consent of the Fathers.”

It was of critical importance to establish a **link** with Tradition. This group of influential theologians included such greats as Sts. Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Irenaeus, and Justin. Trent taught that **bishops**, “who have succeeded to the place of the apostles,” are placed by the Holy Spirit “to rule the Church of God; that they are **higher than priests** (*presbyteris superioris esse*;) and are able to confer the sacrament of Confirmation, to ordain the ministers of the Church and to fulfill many other functions, whereas those of lower order have no power to perform any of these acts.” (my emphasis added) Oh my, “higher” is such a loaded term, don’t you think? ☺ But in the **hierarchy** (lit. “sacred order”), bishops rightly **are** situated above priests and deacons. Canons on the sacrament followed, dogmatically defining aspects of the priesthood. They categorically condemned errors **denying** the visible and external priesthood, the sacramental nature of the priesthood, or the existence of a true hierarchy within the clergy.

In the ordination of a bishop, Trent decreed that neither the consent nor the authority of any civil power or magistrate is required. Those daring to assume the office themselves are to be regarded—not as ministers— but as **thieves** who have entered by the sheepgate. The Church flat out **rejected** the view that the ministers of the Church are called by the people, and not **designated** by proper ecclesiastical authority. Following this, the Council had some **strong words** for bishops (by extension also to priests) who **poorly** exercised their ministry: “All to whom the **care of souls** has been entrusted are subject to the divine command to know their sheep, to offer sacrifice for them, to nourish them by preaching God’s word, by administering the sacraments and by the example of good works of every kind, to have fatherly care of the poor and of all others who are wretched, and to be devoted to other pastoral duties.” (Decree on Reform: Canon 1)

Translation? Far too many bishops were **absent** from their **dioceses**. Trent made the revitalization

of the **residential episcopate** a centerpiece of its reform program. Too many “bishops” were handed out as rewards to noble families. The connection of the shepherd with his sheep had all but been lost in some corners of the world. So, why would a bishop be gone from his diocese? There were many reasons— allow me to cite just one. In the 16th century, several countries had overseas territories. If a native Portuguese priest were to be named a bishop in **Goa** (west coast of India), **Macao** (near Hong Kong) or **Cape Verde**, an island of **1700 miles** southwest of Lisbon, the tug towards home was strong. Some neglected their duty to visit parishes and establish schools. Trent decreed those absences “should never exceed two or at the most three months, whether continuous or interrupted,” and only “for good reasons.” Today, it’s one month.

This **459-year-old** lesson is easily applied in the Church today. Pastoral **presence** is foundational, even if challenging. There are fewer of us priests, yet our duties have not diminished. Unquestionably, **Archbishop Hebda** is the most visibly present **shepherd** I have known in my 33 years of ministry. I honestly cannot comprehend how he does it. Omnipresent, he out hustles priests half his age! Yet by his example, we are encouraged to be **more attentive**, responsive, and present to our flock. All too aware of my shortcomings, I **can say** that only twice have I been absent from an assignment for more than ten days—in 1999 while serving as cruise chaplain aboard a ship to **Antarctica** (while in Vocations ministry) and in 2017 while trekking to **Mount Everest** Base Camp— each trip was two weeks. Quite honestly, when absent, I feel like I am playing hooky from school!

- An intrepid **Canadian** couple decided to re-trace the historic **Oxcart Trail** from Winnipeg, MB through Pembina, ND to St. Paul. In 2018, I visited the Pembina, ND parish for their 200th anniversary— it’s the oldest parish in the province (MN, ND, SD). They experienced all the hardships that a typical fur trader of **150 years ago** would have faced. Their ox “Zeke” developed pneumonia and needed new steel-toe shoes! After two months, they **arrived** in downtown St. Paul **Friday** at the Mississippi’s historic Lower Landing.
- It is always among my great joys to celebrate the **wedding** of a faith-filled couple. But when the newlyweds and wedding party all **return** the following morning for 10:00 Sunday Mass? **Priceless!**
- Mixed messages? I have heard from not a few Catholics who are **troubled** and confused over the **mixed messages** following the reception of Holy Communion at St. Peter’s Basilica by a prominent politician who had been barred from receiving by her own Archbishop. Though I can understand your bewilderment, I would offer this advice. **Stay the course!** When stressed by things **beyond** our control, we suffer spiritually. Read [2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#).
- The Minnesota Twins will be represented at Tuesday’s All-Star Game at L.A.’s Dodger Stadium by 1B **Luis Arráez** (.348 BA) and CF **Byron Buxton** (23 HR). Each is most deserving. It is the first appearance for each at the mid-summer classic. Congratulations!
- Has it been that long? This month marked the **25th anniversary** of Hong Kong’s handover to the People’s Republic of China. Whether the purported “one country, two systems” idea retains any **validity** is tenuous at best.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,

Rector