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What People Expect of Priests

Cardinal Castrillón

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Cardinal Castrillón on What People Expect of Priests

To Encounter Christ, He Says at Videoconference

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 14, 2004 (Zenit.org).- People today seek one thing from a priest: to encounter Christ, contemplating in him the face of God, says the prefect of the Congregation for Clergy.

Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos made that point during a theologians videoconference organized by the Vatican dicastery he heads.

The theme of the videoconference, "Priests, Forgers of Saints in the Third Millennium," was the same as that of the International Congress of Priests held last month in Malta.

Introducing the 32nd International Theological Conference, the cardinal said that the priest, *"loved by God and a saint by vocation, ... has been qualified to speak with the 'I' of Christ. In his gesture of blessing and his hands raised in the Eucharistic sacrifice flow the life and salvific action of Christ himself, for the good of humanity."*

"With his life, the priest attests that the object of holiness is not found in itself, but that it is a journey toward God, who is holy, and toward men, who thirst for God," the cardinal said.

"Contemporary man has as his only great expectation to encounter Christ. People ask to be able to contemplate in him [the priest] the merciful face of God."

The relators of the videoconference -- Monsignors Juan Esquerda Bifet and Antonio Miralles and

Legionary Father Paolo Scarafoni -- emphasized that the priestly ministry, called to be in constant contact with the transcendent holiness of God, becomes, in Christ, the bearer of this holiness in the world.



Monsignor Esquerda Bifet, professor at Rome's Urban University, presented the priest's life of holiness as key "so that the Gospel can penetrate in a genuine way in cultures and also, in a special way, in our sociocultural and historical situation."

Monsignor Miralles, professor at the University of the Holy Cross, said that the Church' pastors "are credible in the measure that they reveal Christ."

According to the prelate, it is necessary to carry out pastoral service in three ways. First, "not out of obligation, almost wishing to be rid of it as a heavy burden, but willingly, according to Jesus' example, obedient to the Father unto death."

"In the second place, not for profit but with a good heart," he said. "It is the contrast between the hireling and the good shepherd. The hireling 'cares nothing for the sheep'; his interest is earnings. Instead, 'the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.'"



In the third place, not behaving as masters of the faithful who have been entrusted to them, but being "models for the flock," Monsignor Miralles said. "The shepherds are not the owners of the flock, because the flock is God's."

In his address, Father Paolo Scarafoni, rector of the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University, illustrated the "new means for the formation of the clergy." This includes the need for more-frequent presbyterial meetings; the use of the new means of communication to promote ecclesial communion, in particular between bishops and priests; and permanent formation.

Cardinal Castrillón said: "In this long winter of anthropology without Christ and a spiritualist humanism, celebrated by an esoteric and pantheistic religiosity, the Church does not remain inactive or indifferent. With the faithfulness of her priests she wishes to illuminate the darkness of a culture that dispenses with God and to be guide toward the dawn of a spring of holiness among men."

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