



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 19 August 2009*

(Video)

***Saint John Eudes and the formation of the diocesan clergy***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today is the liturgical Memorial of St John Eudes, a tireless apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who lived in France in the 17th century that was marked by opposing religious phenomena and serious political problems. It was the time of the Thirty Years' War, which devastated not only a large part of Central Europe but also souls. While contempt for the Christian faith was being spread by certain currents of thought which then prevailed, the Holy Spirit was inspiring a spiritual renewal full of fervour with important figures such as de Bérulle, St Vincent de Paul, St Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort and St John Eudes. This great "French school" of holiness also included St John Mary Vianney. Through a mysterious design of Providence, my venerable Predecessor Pius XI canonized John Eudes and the Curé d'Ars together, on 31 May 1925, holding up to the whole world two extraordinary examples of priestly holiness.

In the context of the Year for Priests, I want to dwell on the apostolic zeal of St John Eudes, which he focused in particular on the formation of the diocesan clergy. The saints are true interpreters of Sacred Scripture. In the experience of their lives the saints have verified the truth of the Gospel; thus they introduce us into a knowledge and understanding of the Gospel. In 1563 the Council of Trent issued norms for the establishment of diocesan seminaries and for the formation of priests, since the Council was well aware that the whole crisis of the Reformation was also conditioned by the inadequate formation of priests who were not properly prepared for the priesthood either

intellectually or spiritually, in their hearts or in their minds. This was in 1563; but since the application and realization of the norms was delayed both in Germany and in France, St John Eudes saw the consequences of this omission. Prompted by a lucid awareness of the grave need for spiritual assistance in which souls lay because of the inadequacy of the majority of the clergy, the Saint, who was a parish priest, founded a congregation specifically dedicated to the formation of priests. He founded his first seminary in the university town of Caen, a particularly appreciated experience which he very soon extended to other dioceses. The path of holiness, which he took himself and proposed to his followers, was founded on steadfast trust in the love that God had revealed to humanity in the priestly Heart of Christ and in the maternal Heart of Mary. In those times of cruelty, of the loss of interiority, he turned to the heart to speak to the heart, a saying of the Psalms very well interpreted by St Augustine. He wanted to recall people, men and women and especially future priests, to the heart by showing them the priestly Heart of Christ and the motherly Heart of Mary. Every priest must be a witness and an apostle of this love for Christ's Heart and Mary's Heart. And here we come to our own time.

Today too people feel in need of priests who witness to God's infinite mercy with a life totally "conquered" by Christ and who learn to do this in the years of their seminary training. After the Synod in 1990 [Pope John Paul II](#) published the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* in which he returned to and updated the norms of the Council of Trent and stressed above all the necessary continuity between the priest's initial and continuing formation. For him this is a true starting point for an authentic reform of the life and apostolate of priests. It is also the key to preventing the "new evangelization" from being merely an attractive slogan and to ensuring that it is expressed in reality. The foundations laid in seminary formation constitute that indispensable "*humus spirituale*" in which "to learn Christ", letting oneself be gradually configured to him, the one and only High Priest and Good Shepherd. The seminary period should therefore be seen as the actualization of the moment when the Lord Jesus, after calling the Apostles and before sending them out to preach, asks them to be with him (cf. Mk 3: 14). When St Mark recounts the calling of the Twelve Apostles he says that Jesus had a twofold purpose: firstly that they should be with him, and secondly, that they should be sent out to preach. Yet, in being with him always, they really proclaim Christ and bring the reality of the Gospel to the world.

During this [Year for Priests](#) I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to pray for priests and for all those who are preparing to receive the extraordinary gift of the ministerial priesthood. I address to you all and thus I conclude the exhortation of St John Eudes who said to priests: "Give yourselves to Jesus in order to enter the immensity of his great Heart which contains the Heart of his Holy Mother and the hearts of all the Saints and lose yourselves in this abyss of love, charity, mercy, humility, purity, patience, submission and holiness" (*Coeur admirable*, III, 2).

With this in mind, let us now sing the "Our Father" in Latin.

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## To special groups

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I offer a warm welcome to the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including the pilgrims from India and Nigeria. Our Catechesis considers St John Eudes whose feast we celebrate today. He lived in 17th-century France which, notwithstanding considerable trials for the faith, produced many outstanding examples of spiritual courage and insight. St John Eudes' particular contribution was the foundation of a religious congregation dedicated to the task of giving solid formation to the diocesan priesthood. He encouraged seminarians to grow in holiness and to trust in God's love revealed to humanity in the priestly heart of Jesus and in the maternal heart of Mary. During this year let us pray in a special way for priests and seminarians that, inspired by today's Saint, they may spiritually "enter into the heart of Jesus", becoming men of true love, mercy, humility and patience, renewed in holiness and pastoral zeal. My dear Brothers and Sisters, upon you and your families I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May the wonderful figure of St John Eudes, whom I have just mentioned, help each one of you to make more and more progress in loving God who gives fullness of meaning to youth, to suffering and to family life. I thank you all for your presence. May the Lord bless you!

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