



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Saint Peter's Square*  
*Wednesday, 30 June 2010*

***Saint Joseph Cafasso***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

We have just come to the end of the Year for Priests: a time of grace that has yielded and will yield precious fruits for the Church; an opportunity to remember in prayer all those who have responded to this particular calling. The Curé d'Ars and other holy priests have accompanied us on this journey as models and intercessors, true beacons in the history of the Church. Today, as I announced last Wednesday, I would like to recall another of them, who stands out from the group of "social saints" of Turin in the 19th century: it is St Joseph Cafasso.

It seems appropriate to remember him because exactly a week ago was the 150th anniversary of his death in the Piedmontese capital on 23 June 1860, when he was 49 years old. In addition, I would like to recall that on 1 November 1924, in approving the miracles for the canonization of St John Mary Vianney and publishing the Decree authorizing the beatification of Cafasso, Pius XI juxtaposed these two priestly figures with the following words: "Not without a special and beneficial disposition of Divine Goodness have we witnessed new stars rising on the horizon of the Catholic Church: the parish priest of Ars and the Venerable Servant of God, Joseph Cafasso. These two beautiful, beloved, providently timely figures must be presented today; one, the parish priest of Ars, as small and humble, poor and simple as he was glorious; and the other, a beautiful, great, complex and rich figure of a priest, the educator and formation teacher of priests, Venerable Joseph Cafasso". These circumstances give us the opportunity to know the living and timely message that emerges from the life of this Saint. He was not a parish priest like the Curé d'Ars but

was above all a formation teacher of parish and diocesan priests, indeed of holy priests such as St John Bosco. He did not found religious institutes like the other Piedmontese priests of the 19th century because his "foundation" was the "school of priestly life and holiness", which he achieved with his example and teaching in the "Convitto Ecclesiastico di S. Francesco d'Assisi" [College-Residence for Clerics of St Francis of Assisi], in Turin.

Joseph Cafasso was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti, the same village in which St John Bosco was born, on 15 January 1811. He was the third of four children. The last, his sister Marianna, was to be the mother of Bl. Joseph Allamano, Founder of the Consolata Missionary Fathers and the Consolata Missionary Sisters. He was born in 19th-century Piedmont, marked by serious social problems but also by many Saints who strove to find remedies for them. These Saints were bound to each other by total love of Christ and by their profound charity for the poorest people. The grace of the Lord can spread and multiply the seeds of holiness! Cafasso completed his secondary school studies and the two years of philosophy at the College of Chieri and, in 1839, went on to the theological seminary where he was ordained a priest in 1833. Four months later he entered what for him was to be the fundamental and only "stage" in his priestly life: the "Convitto Ecclesiastico di S. Francesco d'Assisi" in Turin. Having entered it to perfect himself in pastoral ministry, it was here that he brought to fruition his gifts as a spiritual director and his great spirit of charity. The "Convitto" was in fact not only a school of moral theology where young priests, who came mainly from the countryside, learned how to become confessors and how to preach but was also a true and proper school of priestly life, where priests were formed in the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola and in the moral and pastoral theology of the great holy Bishop St Alphonsus Mary de' Liguori. The type of priest that Cafasso met at the "Convitto" and that he himself helped to strengthen especially as Rector was that of the true pastor with a rich inner life and profound zeal in pastoral care, faithful to prayer, committed to preaching and to catechesis, dedicated to the celebration of the Eucharist and to the ministry of Confession, after the model embodied by St Charles Borromeo and St Francis de Sales and promoted by the Council of Trent. A felicitous saying of St John Bosco sums up the meaning of educational work in that community: "at the 'Convitto' men learn to be priests".

St Joseph Cafasso sought to bring this model into being in the formation of the young priests so that, in turn, they might become the formation teachers of other priests, religious and lay people, forming a special and effective chain. From his chair of moral theology he taught them to be good confessors and spiritual directors, concerned for the true spiritual good of people, motivated equally by a desire to make God's mercy felt and, by an acute and lively sense of sin. Cafasso the teacher had three main virtues, as St John Bosco recalled: calmness, wisdom and prudence. For him the test of the lessons taught was the ministry of Confession, to which he himself devoted many hours of the day. Bishops, priests, religious, eminent laymen and women and simple people sought him. He was able to give them all the time they needed. He was also a wise spiritual counsellor to many who became Saints and founders of religious institutes. His teaching was never abstract, nor based exclusively on the books that were used in that period. Rather, it was

born from the living experience of God's mercy and the profound knowledge of the human soul that he acquired in the long hours he spent in the confessional and in spiritual direction: his was a real school of priestly life.

His secret was simple: to be a man of God; to do in small daily actions "what can result in the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls". He loved the Lord without reserve, he was enlivened by a firmly-rooted faith, supported by profound and prolonged prayer and exercised in sincere charity to all. He was versed in moral theology but was likewise familiar with the situation and hearts of people, of whose good he took charge as the good pastor that he was. Those who had the grace to be close to him were transformed into as many good pastors and sound confessors. He would point out clearly to all priests the holiness to achieve in their own pastoral ministry. Bl. Fr Clement Marchisio, Founder of the Daughters of St Joseph, declared: "You entered the 'Convitto' as a very mischievous, thoughtless youth, with no idea of what it meant to be a priest; and you came out entirely different, fully aware of the dignity of the priest". How many priests were trained by him at the "Convitto", and then accompanied by him spiritually! Among them as I have said emerges St John Bosco who had him as his spiritual director for a good 25 years, from 1835 to 1860: first as a seminarian, then as a priest and lastly as a Founder. In all the fundamental decisions of his life St John Bosco had St Joseph Cafasso to advise him, but in a very specific way: Cafasso never sought to form Don Bosco as a disciple "in his own image and likeness", and Don Bosco did not copy Cafasso; he imitated Cafasso's human and priestly virtues, certainly and described him as "a model of priestly life" but according to his own personal disposition and his own specific vocation; a sign of the wisdom of the spiritual teacher and of the intelligence of the disciple: the former did not impose himself on the latter but respected his personality and helped him to interpret God's will for him. Dear friends, this is a valuable lesson for all who are involved in the formation and education of the young generations and also a strong reminder of how important it is to have a spiritual guide in one's life, who helps one to understand what God expects of each of us. Our Saint declared with simplicity and depth: "All a person's holiness, perfection and profit lies in doing God's will perfectly.... Happy are we if we succeed in pouring out our heart into God's, in uniting our desires and our will to his to the point that one heart and one will are formed: wanting what God wants, wanting in the way, in the time and in the circumstances that he desires and willing it all for no other reason than that God wills it".

However, another element characterizes the ministry of our Saint: attention to the least and in particular to prisoners who in 19th-century Turin lived in inhumane and dehumanizing conditions. In this sensitive service too, which he carried out for more than 20 years, he was always a good, understanding and compassionate pastor: qualities perceived by the prisoners who ended up by being won over by his sincere love, whose origin lay in God himself. Cafasso's simple presence did good: it reassured, it moved hearts hardened by the events of life and above all it enlightened and jolted indifferent consciences. In his early prison ministry he often had recourse to great sermons that managed to involve almost the entire population of the prison. As time passed, he gave priority to plain catechesis in conversation and in personal meetings. Respectful of each

individual's affairs, he addressed the important topics of Christian life, speaking of trust in God, of adherence to his will, of the usefulness of prayer and of the sacraments whose goal is Confession, the encounter with God who makes himself infinite mercy for us. Those condemned to death were the object of very special human and spiritual care. He accompanied to the scaffold 57 of the men sentenced to death, having heard their confession and having administered the Eucharist to them. He accompanied them with deep love until the last breath of their earthly existence.

Joseph Cafasso died on 23 June 1860, after a life offered entirely to the Lord and spent for his neighbour. My Predecessor, the Venerable Servant of God [Pope Pius XII](#), proclaimed him Patron of Italian prisons on 9 April 1948, and, with his Apostolic Exhortation *Menti Nostrae*, on 23 September 1950 held him up as a model to priests engaged in Confession and in spiritual direction.

Dear brothers and sisters, may St Joseph Cafasso's example serve as a reminder to all to hasten towards the perfection of Christian life, towards holiness. In particular, may this Saint remind priests of the importance of devoting time to the sacrament of Reconciliation and to spiritual direction, and to all the concern we should have for the most deprived. May we find help in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom St Joseph Cafasso was very devoted and whom he called "Our beloved Mother, our consolation, our hope".

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#### To Special Groups

Yesterday, on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, I conferred the Pallium upon thirty-eight Archbishops from throughout the world. I would now like to greet the English-speaking Archbishops present at today's Audience, together with their family members and the pilgrimage groups which accompanied them to the Tombs of the Apostles:

Archbishop Alex Thomas Kaliyanil of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe),  
 Archbishop Gerard Tlali Lerotholi of Maseru (Lesotho),  
 Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan (Philippines),  
 Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham (England),  
 Archbishop Jerome Edward ListECKI of Milwaukee (USA),  
 Archbishop Stephen Brislin of Cape Town (South Africa),  
 Archbishop Dennis Schnurr of Cincinnati (USA),  
 Archbishop Francis Kallarakal of Verapoly (India),  
 Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-joong of Kwangju (Korea),  
 Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami (USA),  
 Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark (England),  
 and Archbishop Matthias Kobena Nketsiah of Cape Coast (Ghana).

Dear Brothers, I ask the Lord to strengthen all of you in your witness to the apostolic faith and in

generous service to the flocks entrusted to your care.

I also greet the many other English-speaking visitors and pilgrims present at today's Audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Ghana, Palestine, the Philippines, South Korea, Canada and the United States of America. I thank the Schola Cantorum of Saint Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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