
Pope: Priestly conversion needed for church reform

By

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

Nov. 04, 2010

Article Details

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Pope Benedict XVI blesses the tomb of Pope John Paul I on All Souls' Day at the Vatican Nov. 2. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano, via Reuters)

VATICAN CITY -- Personal conversion and purification, especially for priests, are critical steps in the process of true and credible reform of the church, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The church community today is experiencing "trials and suffering, and it shows the need for purification and reform," he said.

The pope made his remarks in a written message on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the Nov. 1 canonization of St. Charles Borromeo. A copy of the message, addressed to Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi of Milan, was released to journalists Nov. 4, the feast of St. Charles.

Pope Benedict recalled how St. Charles, who was archbishop of Milan, was a major influence in the church's counter-reformation movement.

At the time, the church community suffered from major divisions, "doctrinal confusions, faith and customs whose purity was clouded, and the bad example of various sacred ministers," he said.

"St. Charles did not limit himself to deploring or condemning" the problems or just hoping for others to change, he said. Rather, he began by reforming his own life, relinquishing all wealth and comfort and filling his life with prayer, penance and dedication to his flock, said the pope.

"He knew that a serious and credible reform had to begin with the pastors" if it was to have truly beneficial and lasting effects on the people of God, said Pope Benedict.

At every moment in history, the most fundamental and urgent task of the church is for every member to convert and get closer to God, he said.

St. Charles Borromeo is an appropriate example of someone who, through personal and communal conversion, was able to "transform hearts" through the power of prayer and penance.

The pope urged all priests and deacons to turn their lives into "a courageous journey toward sainthood and to not fear the exhilaration of Christ's trusting love."