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Happy Feast of St. Charles Borromeo

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Distinctly Catholic

The Holy Father invoked the memory of the saintly former archbishop of Milan today while calling for priests to renew their faith.

Borromeo is of special significance to those of us who care deeply about Vatican II as well. What did a Council Father at Trent have to do with Vatican II?

It turns out that Pope John XXIII, who convoked Vatican II, was a church historian and he had edited the "acta" of Borromeo's apostolic visitations after the Council of Trent. The archbishop went from church to church throughout his sprawling archdiocese to ensure that the reforms enacted at Trent were being implemented. When John XXIII opened Vatican II, he knew exactly what reform was all about from studying Borromeo's work.

This is also critical to understanding what Pope Benedict means when he speaks of a "hermeneutic of reform," with elements of both continuity and discontinuity. If there was no need for change, there was no need for a Council. But, we Catholics do not just come up with change *ex nihilo*. In trying to address the needs of his day, Pope John looked back to the tradition of the Church to chart a way forward. He knew from his study of that tradition that a Council can have a life-giving effect on the Church, that to be truly new, one needed to be authentically traditional, and that to be authentically traditional, one needed to be committed to the on-going work of reform.

So, happy festa San Carlo. The Church still needs your prayers!

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