

Opposite of a pure heart is hypocrisy, papal preacher tells pope

VATICAN CITY – The beatitude, “Blessed are the pure of heart,” is an appeal for honesty and humility, the preacher of the papal household told Pope Benedict XVI and top Vatican officials.

Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, leading the traditional Friday Lenten reflection at the Vatican March 9, said that only in the 19th century did people begin equating the phrase of Jesus with “do not commit impure acts.”

The opposite of purity of heart, he said, is not impurity but hypocrisy.

In the teaching of Jesus, purity of heart is not a specific virtue, but rather a quality that must accompany all virtues, he said. It is the quality that ensures a good deed or correct attitude is truly a virtue and not a mask or act put on in order to win praise and adulation, he said.

Father Cantalamessa said secular movements for justice and nonviolence use the beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” but too few people realize the social impact that would come from following the call for purity of heart, a call to live the values one preaches.

In the preaching of Jesus, he said, the harshest criticism is reserved for religious hypocrites.

The papal preacher said the danger of hypocrisy increases as one becomes more pious and more religious and “the reason is simple: Where there is greater esteem for the values of the spirit, of piety, of virtue or even orthodoxy, there also is a greater temptation to show them off.”

Father Cantalamessa said that never having found a formula for an examination of conscience that covers hypocrisy, he decided he had to add questions to his own daily accounting: “Have I been a hypocrite? Have I been more concerned with how people see me than with how God sees me?”

The preacher told the pope and Vatican officials that the world would be a better place if everyone kept alive in themselves a yearning for a purity of heart, “for a world that is clean, true, sincere and without either religious or secular hypocrisy, a world in which actions correspond to words, words to thoughts, and the thoughts of human beings to those of God.”