



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II FOR THE 41st WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

2 MAY 2004 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. *"Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest"* (Lk 10: 2).

These words that Jesus addressed to the Apostles show the attention that the Good Shepherd always paid to his sheep. He does everything so that they *"may have life, and have it abundantly"* (Jn 10: 10). After his Resurrection, the Lord entrusted his disciples with the responsibility to continue his same mission, so that the Gospel would be proclaimed to men and women of all times. Many are those who have generously responded and continue to respond to the constant invitation of Jesus: *"Follow me!"* (Jn 21: 22); they are men and women who accept to place their lives at the complete service of his Kingdom.

On the occasion of the upcoming 41st World Day of Prayer for Vocations, held traditionally on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, all of the faithful join in fervent prayer for vocations to the priesthood, to the consecrated life and to missionary service. Indeed, our primary duty is to pray to the "Lord of the harvest" for those who already follow Christ very closely in the priesthood and religious life, and for those whom he in his mercy continues to call to such important ecclesial service.

2. *Let us pray for vocations!*

In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I noted how "in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is *a widespread demand for spirituality*, a demand which expresses itself in a large part as *a renewed need for prayer*" (n. 33). Our unanimous request to the Lord is inserted into this "need for prayer" so that he *"send out labourers into his harvest"*.

I acknowledge with joy that in many particular Churches, cenacles of prayer for vocations are being formed. In the major seminaries and in houses of formation of religious and missionary institutes, gatherings are held for this purpose. Numerous families become little "cenacles" of prayer, helping young people to answer the Divine Master's call with courage and generosity.

Yes! The vocation to serve Christ alone in his Church is an inestimable gift of the divine goodness, a gift to implore with insistence and trusting humility. The Christian must be always more open to this gift, careful not to waste "the time of grace" and "the time of visitation" (cf. Lk 19: 44).

Prayer joined to sacrifice and suffering is of special value. Suffering, lived in one's own body as a completion of what is lacking *"in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body, the church"* (Col 1: 24), becomes a very effective form of intercession. Many sick people throughout the world unite their sufferings to the Cross of Christ, imploring for holy vocations. They accompany me spiritually as well, in the Petrine ministry that God has entrusted to me, and offer to the cause of the Gospel a precious contribution, even if it is often completely hidden.

3. *Let us pray for those called to the priesthood and to religious life!*

My heartfelt wish is that prayer for vocations be intensified ever more; prayer that is adoration of the mystery of God and thanksgiving for the *"great things"* that he has accomplished and does not cease to carry out, despite human weakness. Contemplative prayer is pervaded with wonder and gratitude for the gift of vocations.

The Eucharist is at the centre of all prayer initiatives. The sacrament of the Altar holds a decisive value for the birth of vocations and for their perseverance, because from Christ's redemptive sacrifice those called are able to draw strength to dedicate themselves entirely to the proclamation of the Gospel. It is good that adoration of the Blessed Sacrament goes hand-in-hand with the Eucharistic Celebration, thus prolonging, in a certain sense, the mystery of the Holy Mass.

Contemplating Christ, truly and substantially present under the species of bread and wine, can give rise in the heart of the person called to the priesthood or to a particular mission in the Church the same enthusiasm that led Peter to exclaim on the mount of the Transfiguration: *"Lord, it is good that we are here!"* (Mt 17: 4; cf. Mc 9: 5; Lk 9: 33). This is a privileged way to contemplate the face of Christ with Mary and at the school of Mary, who for her interior disposition can be rightly called "woman of the Eucharist" (Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 53).

May all Christian communities become *"authentic schools of prayer"*, where one prays that labourers may not be lacking in the vast field of apostolic work. It then becomes necessary that the Church accompany with constant spiritual attention those whom God has called and who *"follow the Lamb wherever he goes"* (Rv 14: 4): I refer to priests, Religious, hermits, consecrated virgins, members of secular institutes - in short, all those who have received the gift of the vocation and

carry "*this treasure in earthen vessels*" (II Cor 4: 7). In the Mystical Body of Christ there is a wide variety of ministries and charisms (cf. I Cor 12: 12), all of them meant for the sanctification of the Christian people. In the reciprocal attention for holiness, which must animate every member of the Church, it is necessary to pray so that those "called" remain faithful to their vocation and reach the highest possible degree of evangelical perfection.

4. *Prayer of those called.*

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* I stressed that "a necessary requirement of this pastoral charity towards one's own particular Church and its future ministry is the concern which the priest should have to find, so to speak, someone to replace him in the priesthood" (n. 74). While it is known that God calls those whom he wills (cf. Mk 3: 13), it must nevertheless be the concern of every minister of Christ to pray with perseverance for vocations. No one better than he is able to understand the urgency of a generational exchange that guarantees generous and holy persons for the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

Precisely in this prospective, it is more necessary than ever "to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to personal vocation and mission" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 63). The strength of the witness given by those called and their ability to involve others and inspire each of them to entrust his or her own life to Christ depends on their holiness. Such is the way to counteract the reduction in vocations to the consecrated life which threatens the continuance of many apostolic works, especially in mission countries.

Moreover, the prayer of those called - priests and consecrated persons - is of special value since it is part of the priestly prayer of Christ. Through them he prays to the Father so that he sanctify and keep in his love those whom, although being in the world, do not belong to it (cf. Jn 17: 14-16).

May the Holy Spirit make the entire Church a praying people who raise their voices to the Heavenly Father to implore holy vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. Let us pray so that those chosen and called by the Lord be faithful and joyful witnesses of the Gospel, to which they have consecrated their existence.

5. *We turn to you, Lord, in trust!*

Son of God,
sent by the Father to the
men and women of every time and of
every part of the earth!

We call upon you through Mary,

your Mother and ours:
may the Church not
lack in vocations,
especially those dedicated in a
special way to your Kingdom.

Jesus, only Saviour of mankind!

We pray to you for our
brothers and sisters who have
answered "yes" to your
call to the priesthood,
to the consecrated life and
to the missions.

May their lives be renewed day by
day, to become a living Gospel.

Merciful and holy Lord,
continue to send new labourers
into the harvest of your Kingdom!

Assist those whom you call
to follow you in our day;
contemplating your face,
may they respond with joy
to the wondrous mission
that you entrust to them
for the good of your People
and of all men and women.

You who are God and live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever. Amen.

From the Vatican, 23 November 2003

JOHN PAUL II

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