



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF *SANTA MARIA LIBERATRICE*

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 14 January 1979

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. We have listened to the Word of God in today's liturgy, which speaks to us in the text of the book of Samuel, the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians, and the Gospel of St John. Although these texts, which we have heard, are very different, the Word of God of this Sunday speaks to us above all of one question: "vocation", the "call". This is stressed in the description contained in the book of Samuel: God calls a boy by name; He calls him in a perceptible voice, speaking his name. Samuel hears the voice and wakes up from sleep three times, and for three times he fails to understand whose voice it is, who is calling him by name. Only on the fourth time, instructed by Eli, does he give a suitable answer: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears" (1 Sam 3:9).

This passage from the book of Samuel enables us to understand more thoroughly the vocation of the first Apostles, of Andrew and Peter called by Jesus Christ. They, too, accept the call, and follow Jesus; first Andrew, who announces to his brother: "We have found the Messiah"; then, in his turn, Simon, to whom Jesus, during their first meeting, announces his new name, "Cephas" ("which means Peter" Jn 1:42).

When we then follow the thought that St Paul expresses in the letter to the Corinthians, our subject seems to open to a further dimension. The Apostle writes to those to whom his letter is addressed: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

God, who calls man to his service and assigns a task to him, has a fundamental right to do so. He alone has this right, because he is the Creator and Redeemer of each of us. If he calls us, if he

invites us to follow a given way, he does so in order that we will not dissipate his work; in order that we may respond with our own lives to the gift received from him; in order that we may live in a way worthy of man, who is "a temple of God"; in order that we may be able to carry out that particular duty, which he wishes to entrust to us.

2. The Parish, which—according to the affirmation of the Second Vatican Council—is "a kind of cell" of the diocese (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10), is just the environment in which the Christian must hear the call that God addresses to him, accept it and realize it; and he is certainly helped in that by the *faith* and the *life of faith* of the whole parish community. A life of faith, which has its beginning in the family, dynamically integrated in the parish, and which develops from Baptism to the meeting with Christ in death; following the principle of the close collaboration between the family and the parish, which cooperate together in the formation of the responsible and mature Christian.

Here, therefore, is the indispensable necessity of *parish catechesis*, which integrates and completes the teaching of religion imparted at school, and connects religious knowledge with *sacramental life*.

Just in this context, each of the parishioners—especially if young—must put to himself responsibly the fundamental question of his own Christian existence: "To what does God call me?". It may be the call to a given profession, which puts one in the service of others and of society, such as being a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer, a professional, a worker ... ; or the vocation to family life, by means of the sacrament of Marriage; or the call, for some, to exclusive service of God, as happened—the Liturgy reminds us today—in the case of Samuel, Andrew, and Simon. But the whole life of a man and a Christian, the fruit of the infinite love of God the Father, is a "vocation" which embraces the different stages of existence, and gives a meaning to the various situations, even to suffering, illness, old age. The Christian must always, and in all circumstances, be able to repeat, with faith and with conviction, the words of the young Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears" (I Sam 3:9).

3. I would like this moving and generous readiness to accept God's call to be always present in all the many faithful of this parish, to form a living Christian community, joyful and proud to be able to say "yes" to Christ and to the Church.

My affectionate thought goes in the first place to the parish priest and his collaborators, who unselfishly dedicate their energies to the good of the parish; it goes to the children, who give consolation and hope; to the adolescents, who are beginning their first steps, which may also be difficult ones, towards the commitments of life; to the young, who seek joy, the fullness of joy; to adults, eager to contribute with all their might to the construction of a more just and more serene society; to fathers and mothers, who wish to preserve and renew the strength of their indissoluble union; to the sick, who suffer in body and in spirit; to the old, eager for understanding, affection,

and the respect they deserve.

A memory and a special greeting for the men and women religious who carry out their meritorious apostolate within the parish: to the Salesians of Don Bosco, who have been working with tireless dedication in the Testaccio district for seventy-five years; to the Daughters of Divine Providence; to the Daughters of Our Lady Help of Christians; to the Community of the Congregation of the Teacher Sisters of St Dorothy, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts.

4. Your parish, dear Brothers and Sisters, is dedicated to St Mary Liberator: from the high altar her image smiles, a fragment of a very ancient fresco which belonged to the Church of "St Mary Liberator at the Roman Forum", notes on which date back to the twelfth century.

This title, with which you invoke the Blessed Virgin here, is a very significant one: man appreciates freedom very much; but at the same time he often does not know how to use it; he uses it badly. Often the wrong use of freedom results in man's losing it; he ceases to be free.

Christ teaches us the good and perfect use of freedom. St Paul was particularly aware of this, when he wrote to the Galatians: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5: 1).

The Mother of Christ collaborates with her Son in this great work which he wishes to carry out in each of us. And she does so in a motherly way, and with such love that only a mother can express.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Let us entrust our freedom to Mary. She will help us to discover that real good which freedom contains.

She will help us to make the best use of freedom; she who "liberates", as every mother does. We know very well that often the very awareness that she is there, hearing everything that has the power to embarrass us, discourage us, humiliate us, takes great weights from our hearts.

Sometimes a word of hers, a look of hers, a smile of hers, is enough.

She "liberates" with kindness, in a motherly way.

Man, who has fallen into the depths and is "entangled" in the many snares, needs this certainty that there is someone who thinks of him as of her own son; Someone for whom he has not lost his value.

She is the Mother who "liberates" by means of love.

I beseech you, Mother of God, Patron Saint of this parish, be a Liberator for all your' sons and your daughters.

St Mary Liberator, pray for us!

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