



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR THE XXXVIII WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

6th MAY 2001 - IV SUNDAY OF EASTER *Theme: "Life as a vocation". Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dearest brothers and sisters throughout the whole world!*¹. The next "World Day of Prayer for Vocations", which will take place on 6th May 2001 and thus only a few months after the close of the Great Jubilee, will have the theme "Life as a vocation". With my present Message, I wish to pause and reflect with you on a topic that is undeniably important in the Christian life. The word "vocation" is a very good definition of the relationship that God has with every human being in the freedom of love, because "every life is a vocation" (Paul VI, Enc. Lett. *Populorum progressio*, 15). God, after completing his work of creation, looked on man and saw that he was "very good" (cf. *Gen* 1, 31): he made him "in his image and likeness", he put the universe into his operative hands and called him to an intimate relationship of love. Vocation is the word that leads us to understand the dynamisms of God's revelation, and thus reveals to man the truth about his existence. "An outstanding cause of human dignity," we read in the Council document *Gaudium et spes*, "lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of origin, man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it. And he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator" (n. 19). It is in this dialogue of love with God that we find the basis of each person's possibility to grow along his or her own lines and according to his or her own characteristics, which have been received as a gift and are able to "give meaning" to his or her personal story and to the fundamental relationships of his or her daily existence, as he or she walks along the path that leads to the fullness of life.² To consider life as a vocation encourages interior freedom, stirring within the person a desire for the future, as well as the rejection of a notion of existence that is passive, boring, and banal. In this way, life takes on the value of a "gift received which, by its nature, tends to become a good given" (Document *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 1997, 16, b). Man shows that he has been reborn in the Spirit (cf. *John* 3, 3-5) when he learns to follow the way of the New Commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (*John* 15, 12). One could say that, in a certain sense, love is the DNA of the children of God; it is the "holy vocation" by which we have been called "in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearance of our Saviour Christ Jesus" (2 *Tim* 1, 9-10). At the root of every vocational journey there is the Emmanuel, the God-with-us. He shows us that we are not alone in fashioning our lives, because God walks with us, in the midst of our ups-and-downs, and, if we want him to, he weaves with each of us a marvellous tale of love, unique and irreproducible, and, at the same time, in harmony with all humanity and the entire cosmos. To discover the presence of God in our individual stories, not to feel orphans any longer, but rather to know that we have a Father in whom we can trust completely - this is the great turning-point that transforms our merely human outlook and leads man to understand, as

Gaudium et spes affirms, that he "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (n. 24). These words of the Second Vatican Council contain the secret of Christian existence and of all authentic human self-realisation.³

Today, however, this Christian reading of existence must reckon with some characteristic traits of Western culture where, in everyday life God is, to all intents and purposes, pushed to the sidelines. That is why we need a unified effort of the whole Christian community to "re-evangelise life". For this fundamental pastoral effort, there has to be the witness of men and women who show the fruitfulness of an existence that has its source in God, that has its strength in its docility to the workings of the Spirit, that has its guarantee of the authentic meaning of daily toil in its communion with Christ and the Church. Within the Christian community, each person must discover his or her own personal vocation and respond to it with generosity. Every life is a vocation, and every believer is invited to co-operate in the building up of the Church. On the "World Day of Prayer for Vocations", however, we turn our attention, in a special way, to the need and to the urgent requirement for ordained ministers, and for persons who are ready to follow Christ on the arduous path of consecrated life in the profession of the evangelical counsels. We need ordained ministers who are "in different times and places the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer" (*Christifideles laici*, 55) and who, in their preaching of the Word and celebration of the Eucharist and the other Sacraments, guide Christian communities on the paths of eternal life. We need men and women who, by their witness, "remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel", and who foster "in the People of God an awareness of the need to respond with holiness of life to the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, by reflecting in their conduct the sacramental consecration which is brought about by God's power in Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders" (*Vita consecrata*, 33). May the Holy Spirit stir up an abundant number of vocations to special consecration, so that these, in their turn, can encourage the Christian people to adhere ever more generously to the Gospel, and so that they can help all people to understand more easily the meaning of existence as the manifestation of the beauty and holiness of God.⁴

My thoughts now go to the many young people who thirst for values and yet who are often unable to find the way that leads to them. Truly, only Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. And so we need to lead them to meet the Lord and help them to establish a deep relationship with Him. Jesus must enter their world, take on their history and open their hearts, so that they learn to know him ever more, as they follow the footprints of his love. In this regard, I think of the important role of the Pastors of the People of God. I remind them of the words of the Second Vatican Council: "In the first place, therefore, by the ministry of the Word and by the personal testimony of a life radiant with the spirit of service and true Pascal joy, priests should have it dearly at heart to demonstrate to the faithful the excellence and necessity of the priesthood ... In this effort, careful and prudent spiritual direction is of the greatest value ... The voice of the Lord in summons, however, is never to be looked for as something which will be heard by the ears of future priests in any extraordinary manner. It is rather to be detected and weighed in the signs by which the will of God is customarily made known to prudent Christians. These indications should be carefully noted by priests" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, 11). Then, I think of consecrated persons, men and women, called to witness to the truth that our only hope is in Christ; that only from Him is it possible to draw the energy required to live out their life-choices; that only with Him can people meet the deep needs of the salvation of humanity. May the presence and the service of consecrated persons open the hearts and the minds of young people to horizons of hope filled with God, and may this presence and service teach them humility, and liberality in loving and in serving. May the meaningfulness they bring to the Church and to culture through their consecrated lives, be ever better translated into specific pastoral contributions, suitable for educating and forming young people to hear the call of the Lord and to have the freedom of spirit to be able to respond to it with generosity and enthusiasm.⁵

Now I address you, dear Christian parents, to exhort you to be close to your children. Do not leave them alone when they are faced with the weighty decisions of adolescence and youth. Help them to prevent themselves from being overwhelmed by an anxious searching after material well-being,

and guide them towards that genuine happiness which belongs to the spirit. Make the liberating joy of the faith resound in their hearts, which are at times seized by fears for the future. Teach them, as wrote my venerated predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, "how to savour in a simple way the many human joys that the Creator places in our path: the elating joy of existence and of life; the joy of chaste and sanctified love; the peaceful joy of nature and silence; the sometimes austere joy of work well done; the joy and satisfaction of duty performed; the transparent joy of purity, service and sharing; the demanding joy of sacrifice" (*Gaudete in Domino*, I). The activity of the family must be supported by that of catechists and Christian teachers, called in a special way to encourage in young people a sense of vocation. Their task is to guide the young generations towards discovering the plan of God for each of them, cultivating in them the readiness, when God calls them, to turn their lives into a gift for that mission. This will happen by means of continual decisions that prepare for the total "yes", by which one's whole existence is placed at the service of the Gospel. Dear catechists and teachers, in order to reach this goal, help the young people entrusted to your care to look upwards, to overcome the constant temptation to compromise. Teach them to trust in God who is Father, and show them the extraordinary greatness of his love which entrusts to each one a personal task at the service of the great mission of "renewing the face of the earth".

6. We read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles that the first Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2, 42). Every encounter with the Word of God is a propitious moment for mentioning vocation. Frequent contact with Sacred Scripture helps us to grasp the manner and the actions that God uses when choosing, teaching, and making us sharers in his love. The celebration of the Eucharist and prayer make us understand better the words of Jesus: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (*Mt* 9, 37-38; cf. *Lk* 10, 2). When one prays for vocations, one learns to look with the wisdom of the Gospel at the world and at the needs of life and the salvation of every human being. Moreover, one lives the charity and compassion of Christ towards humanity, and one has the grace to be able to say, following the example of Our Lady: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1, 38). I invite everyone to join me in imploring the Lord, so that there will never be a lack of labourers in his harvest:

Holy Father, eternal source of existence and love,
 who, in living man, show the splendour of your glory,
 and who put in his heart the seed of your call,
 let no-one, by reason of our negligence, ignore or lose this gift,
 but may everyone walk, with wholehearted generosity,
 towards the realisation of your Love.

Lord Jesus, who in your pilgrimage along the roads of Palestine,
 chose and called the apostles and entrusted to them their task
 of preaching the Gospel, feeding the faithful and celebrating divine worship,
 ensure that today, too, your Church may not lack
 numerous holy priests, who can bring to all
 the fruits of your death and resurrection.
 Holy Spirit, who sanctify the Church
 with the constant pouring out of your gifts,
 place into the hearts of those called to the consecrated life
 a deep-rooted and resolute passion for the Kingdom,

so that with a generous and unconditioned "yes",
they may place their entire existences at the service of the Gospel. Most holy Virgin, who without hesitation
offered yourself to the Almighty
for the carrying out of his plan of salvation,
pour trust into the hearts of young people
so that there may always be zealous pastors
who are able to guide the Christian people on the way of life,
and consecrated souls who may know how to witness,
in chastity, poverty, and obedience,
to the freeing presence of your risen Son.

Amen. *From the Vatican, 14th September 2000.* **JOANNES PAULUS II**