



The Holy See

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

25 APRIL 1999 - IV SUNDAY OF EASTER

Topic: "THE FATHER CALLS TO ETERNAL LIFE"

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
dearest Brothers and Sisters throughout the world!*

The celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations on 25 April, 1999, the fourth Sunday of Easter, constitutes a recurring reminder to consider with attention a fundamental aspect of the life of the Church: the call to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life.

In the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee, the year 1999 opens "*the horizons of believers, so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of the Father who is in heaven (cf Mt 5,45)*" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, 49) and invites them to reflect on the vocation that constitutes the true horizon of every human heart: *eternal life*. It is precisely in this light that the full importance is revealed of the vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life with which the heavenly Father, from whom come "every good endowment and every perfect gift" (*Jam* 1,17), continues to enrich his Church.

A hymn of praise erupts spontaneously from the heart: "Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Eph* 1,3) for the gift, even in this century which is drawing to a close, of innumerable vocations to the priestly ministry and the consecrated life in its different forms.

God continues to show himself as Father by means of men and women who, urged by the strength of the Spirit, give witness by their word and deeds, and sometimes even by martyrdom, to their unlimited dedication to serving their brothers and sisters. Through the ordained ministry of Bishops, priests and deacons, He provides the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence

of Christ the Redeemer (cf *Christifideles Laici*, 22), making the Church grow, thanks to their dedicated service, in the unity of one body and in the variety of vocations, ministries and charisms.

The Father has poured out his Spirit in abundance on his adoptive children, manifesting in the various forms of consecrated life his Fatherly love, which he wishes to extend to the whole of humanity. His love is a love that awaits with patience and welcomes with rejoicing the person who has been far away; which educates and corrects; which satisfies every person's hunger for love. He continues to point out the expectations of eternal life which open the heart to hope, even in the midst of difficulties, pain and death, especially by means of those who leave everything to follow Christ, dedicating themselves totally to the establishment of his Kingdom.

In 1999, dedicated to the heavenly Father, I wish to invite all the faithful to reflect on vocations to the ordained ministry and consecrated life, following the outline of the prayer that Jesus himself taught us, the "Our Father".

1. "Our Father, who art in heaven"

Invoking God as Father means recognising in his love the source of life. In the heavenly Father, the people who are called to be his children become aware of being chosen "in him before the foundation of the world, that [they] should be holy and blameless before him" (*Eph* 1,4). The Second Vatican Council recalls that "*Christ...in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling*" (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). For the human person, fidelity to God is the guarantee of fidelity to his own being and, in this way, of the full realisation of his own project of life.

Every vocation has its roots in Baptism, when the Christian, "*is born of water and the Spirit*" (*Jn* 3,5), and becomes a participant in the event of grace that revealed Jesus, on the banks of the river Jordan, as the "*beloved son*" in whom the Father was well pleased (*Lk* 3,22). Baptism is the source of true fruitfulness for every Christian vocation. Therefore, it is necessary to take particular care to introduce catechumens and children to the rediscovery of Baptism and the establishment of an authentic filial relationship with God.

2. "Hallowed be thy name"

The vocation to be "*holy, as he is holy*" (*Lev* 11,44) is brought about when God is given the place which is his due. In our time, which is secularised yet also fascinated by the search for the sacred, there is a particular need of saints who, by living intensely the primacy of God in their lives, make visible his loving and provident presence.

Holiness, a gift to be constantly requested, constitutes the most precious and effective response to the modern world's hunger for hope and life. Humanity needs holy priests and consecrated souls

who live out daily the total gift of self to God and neighbour; of fathers and mothers who can give witness within the home to the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, reawakening in all those with whom they come into contact the wish to carry out the Creator's plan for the family; of young people who have personally discovered Christ and have been so attracted by him as to move their contemporaries to the cause of the Gospel.

3. "*Thy kingdom come*"

Holiness recalls the "*Kingdom of God*", which Jesus presented symbolically in the great and joyful banquet offered to all, but destined only for those who put on the "*wedding garment*" of grace.

The invocation "*thy kingdom come*" encourages conversion and reminds us that man's earthly day must be marked by the daily search for the Kingdom of God before and above all other things. This invocation invites us to leave the world of fleeting words to take on generously, in spite of every difficulty and opposition, the commitments to which the Lord calls us.

Asking "*thy kingdom come*" of the Lord brings with it, among other things, choosing the house of the Father as one's own dwelling, living and working in the style of the Gospel and loving in the Spirit of Jesus; at the same time, it means discovering that the Kingdom is a "*little seed*" endowed with an unexpected fullness of life, but exposed constantly to the risk of being rejected or trampled down.

Those who are called to the priesthood or consecrated life can welcome the seed of vocation that God has placed in their hearts with a generous openness. Drawing them to follow Christ with an undivided heart, the Father invites them to be joyful and free apostles of the Kingdom. In the generous response to the invitation they will find that true happiness for which their heart is longing.

4. "*Thy will be done*"

Jesus said: "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work*" (Jn 4,34). With these words, he reveals that the personal project of existence is written in the provident plan of the Father. To discover it we have to abandon a too earthly interpretation of life, and place in God the foundation and meaning of our own existence. Above all, vocation is a gift of God: it is not about choosing, but being chosen; it is the response to a love that precedes and accompanies. For the one who bows to the will of the Lord, life becomes a good received, which by its very nature tends to transform itself into an offering and a gift.

5. "*Give us this day our daily bread*"

Jesus made his Father's will his daily food (cf Jn 4,34), he invited his own to taste that bread by

which the hunger for the spirit is satisfied: the bread of the Word and of the Eucharist.

Following the example of Mary, we must learn to educate the heart to hope, opening it to the “infinite love” of God, who makes us exult with joy and gratitude. For those who respond generously to the Lord’s invitation, the happy and sad events of life become, in such a way, the topic for confidential discussion with the Father, and the occasion for unceasing rediscovery of their own identity of beloved children called to participate with a specific and personal role in the great work of the salvation of the world, which was begun by Christ and entrusted now to his Church.

6. *“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”*

Forgiveness and reconciliation are the great gift that exploded into the world from the moment in which Jesus, sent by the Father, openly declared *“the Lord’s year of favour”* (Lk 4,19). He became the *“friend of sinners”* (Mt 11,19), he gave his life *“for the forgiveness of sins”* (Mt 26,28) and, at the end, he sent his disciples to all the ends of the earth to proclaim repentance and forgiveness.

Knowing human fragility, God prepared for man the path of mercy and forgiveness as an experience to share - one is forgiven and one forgives - so that the authentic traits of true children of the one heavenly Father might be seen in the renewed life of grace.

7. *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*

The Christian life is a continuous liberation from evil and from sin. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God’s power and his holiness are communicated as new energy that leads to the liberty to love, making the good triumph.

The struggle against evil, which Christ strenuously fought, is today entrusted to the Church and to every Christian, according to the vocation, charism and ministry of each one. A fundamental role is reserved to those who have been elected to the ordained ministry: bishops, priests and deacons. But an irreplaceable and specific support is offered, among others, by the Institutes of consecrated life, whose members “make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission” (*Vita Consecrata*, 76).

How can we fail to stress that the promotion of vocations to the ordained ministry and the consecrated life must become the harmonious commitment of the whole Church and of individual believers? The Lord commanded them to *“pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest”* (Mt 9,38).

Aware of this, we turn in prayer to the heavenly Father, the giver of every good thing:

8. *Good Father,*
in Christ your Son
you reveal to us your love,
you embrace us as your children
and you offer us the possibility of discovering
in your will the lines
of our true face.

Holy Father,
you call us to be holy
as you are holy.
We pray you, never allow your Church
to lack holy ministers and apostles
who, with the word and the sacraments,
may open the way to the encounter with you.

Merciful Father,
give to lost humanity
men and women who,
through the witness of a life transfigured
to the image of your Son,
may walk joyfully
with their other brothers and sisters
towards our heavenly homeland.

Our Father,
with the voice of your Holy Spirit,
and trusting in the maternal intercession of Mary,
we earnestly beseech you:
send to your Church priests
who will be courageous witnesses
to your infinite bounty.

Amen!

From the Vatican, 1 October 1998, memorial of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, Doctor of the Church.

