



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO BISHOPS FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my venerable Brothers

the Bishops of the United States of America On the occasion of your meeting in Collegeville, Minnesota, I wish to assure you of my spiritual closeness to you and of my prayerful support for your pastoral initiative. You are assembling in a spirit of collegial responsibility to reflect on the vital subject of vocations for your local Churches. Your reflections on vocations to the priesthood and religious life are being linked with reflections on the need for all the members of the Church to be conscious of their common calling to live the Gospel message and to build up the Body of Christ. It is indeed fitting to emphasise over and over again the universal vocation to holiness of the whole People of God. It is truly opportune to proclaim with insistence the need for all the faithful to be aware of the precise responsibilities that derive from their Baptism and Confirmation. In this regard the Second Vatican Council says explicitly that the laity "are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself". A keen realisation of their Christian dignity is a great incentive to all the People of God to fulfil their sacred role in worship, Christian living, evangelization and human advancement. As pastors of the flock it is our responsibility to encourage all our brothers and sisters in the faith to live a life worthy of the calling which they have received. It is our task to assure them of their shared responsibility for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and at the same time to encourage them in their individual contributions to the Church and to the whole of society. These individual contributions are expressive of the rich variety characteristic of the Body of Christ. One of the great tasks of all Catholics is to help foster those conditions in the community that will facilitate individual and social Christian living. Only if the faithful are responding to their personal Christian vocation will the community be sustained in its respect and love for Christian marriage and for the priesthood and religious life. An integral part of Christian family life is the inculcation in its members of an appreciation of the priesthood and religious life in relation to the whole Body of the Church. Our common pastoral experience confirms the fact that there is a very special need in the Church today to promote vocations to the priesthood and to religious life. It also confirms the fact that generous and persevering efforts made in inviting young people to respond to these vocations have been rewarded. I know that in your deliberations you will discuss appropriate ways that this can be ever more effectively accomplished. The correlation of your varied pastoral experiences will undoubtedly assist you greatly in planning for the future. On my part I would like to emphasise above all the general attitude towards vocations to be cultivated within ourselves and to be shared with the clergy and faithful. In this regard it is necessary to foster a profound trust in the power of the Paschal Mystery as the perennial source of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In every age the Church not only reiterates her esteem for these vocations but she acknowledges their unique and irreplaceable character. She likewise expresses the profound conviction that the Lord who wills them for his Church is ever active in calling young people to fulfil his will. The Church's earnestness in

promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious life is explained by her desire to be faithful to God's will to maintain both the hierarchical structure of his Church and the state of religious life. The Church extols and promotes the special consecration proper to both of these vocations even if a certain number of functions exercised by priests and religious are increasingly shared by the laity. Dear Brothers: in union with the whole Church let us face the vocations challenge with that equanimity and realism which take into account the effectiveness of prayer, and which are never devoid of supernatural hope. Let us forcefully proclaim the power of the Risen Christ to continue to draw young people to himself in every age of the Church and therefore in our own. Let us look to the Paschal Mystery as the inexhaustible source of strength for young people to follow Christ with generosity and sacrifice, in chastity, poverty and obedience, and in perfect charity. The Church cannot exempt herself from utilising every worthy means to attract vocations, including proper publicity and personal example; yet, she unhesitatingly proclaims that her strength comes only from the Lord. It is he alone who gives vocations and to overcome obstacles opposed to them. In the assemblies of the faithful let us invoke the Lord's promise to be with his Church until the end of time. We must encourage our people to express their hope in prayer. In acknowledging the Lord's fidelity in providing for the needs of his Spouse, the Church, we offer a hymn of praise to the Lamb of God who was slain – to him who died but now lives for ever and ever. We find in the precious blood of the crucified and risen Saviour the strength to sustain every vocation that God gives to his Church. "To him whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine – to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, world without end. Amen" .*From the Vatican, May 14, 1986. IOANNES PAULUS PP. II* © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana
