



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE EUROPEAN CONGRESS ON VOCATIONS**

Friday, 9 May 1997

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to extend my cordial welcome to all of you who are taking part in the European congress on vocations to the ordained ministry and the consecrated life, currently being held in Rome. I greet Cardinal Pio Laghi, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and I thank him for his courteous address in the name of all those present. With him, I greet the Cardinals and my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate who have gathered here.

I also address a special greeting to the priests, religious and laity who in the Ecclesial Communities are involved in the pastoral care of vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life: I express my appreciation and my warmest encouragement to them.

The busy days of your congress have emphasized how the Church, a pilgrim on the European continent, is called to rekindle *a deep yearning for God*, especially in young people, thus creating a suitable context in which generous vocational responses can be made. For this to happen, everyone must listen to the Spirit fervently and with renewed attention: indeed it is he who is the sure guide to full knowledge of Jesus Christ and to the commitment to follow him without reserve.

2. Sent into the world to continue the Saviour's mission, the Church is *in a constant state of vocation* and is enriched each day with the many charisms of the Spirit. From her intimate union of love and faith with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, she draws the guarantee of a new flowering of priestly vocations and those of special consecration.

This flowering, in fact, is not the result of spontaneous generation or of an activism that relies on human means alone. Jesus makes this clearly understood in the Gospel. Calling his disciples to send them into the world, he urges them above all *to raise their eyes to heaven*: “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Mt 9:38). The vocational pedagogy to which the Lord refers makes it clear that pastoral care which puts a disproportional emphasis on action and promotional efforts may be ineffectual and unsuccessful, because every vocation is primarily a gift of God.

It is therefore urgent that *a great prayer movement* should spread through the Ecclesial Communities of the European continent, opposing the winds of secularism that spur people to give priority to human means, efficiency and a pragmatic life-style. Fervent prayer must constantly rise from parishes, monastic and religious communities, Christian families and places of suffering. It is especially necessary to teach children and young people to open their hearts to the Lord, so that they can be ready to hear his voice.

This atmosphere of faith and of listening to the word of God will enable Christian communities to welcome, guide and form the vocations which the Spirit instils in their midst.

3. Moreover, you must *encourage a qualitative leap* in the pastoral care of vocations in the European Churches. It has often been said that this fundamental task of the Christian community could be delegated to some people willing to assume it. The latter certainly carry out valuable and often hidden work in service to the divine call in various areas of Church life. However, changing historical and cultural conditions demand that the pastoral care of vocations be perceived as *one of the primary objectives of the entire Christian community*.

Those involved in the pastoral care of vocations will make their work all the more effective the more they help individual members of the community to take as their own the task of providing a sufficient number of priests and consecrated persons to meet the needs of the People of God.

It is obvious, however, that the first who should feel involved in the pastoral care of vocations are those called to the priestly ministry and the consecrated life: with the joy of a life given totally to the Lord, they will make the invitation to radically follow Jesus something concrete and exciting, by revealing its surprising meaning.

Christ did not limit himself to praying for labourers to be sent into the harvest, but addressed a personal invitation to them to follow him with the words: “Come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dear priests and religious, do not be afraid to extend the Lord’s invitation to the young people you meet in your daily ministry! May it be your urgent concern to reach out to them and to tell them once again the mysterious and surprising words which also marked your own lives: “Come, follow me”.

4. The Christian community's constant and patient attention to the mystery of the divine calling will thus foster *a new vocational culture* in young people and families. The restlessness felt in the world of youth reveals, even in the new generations, pressing questions about the meaning of life, confirming the fact that nothing and no one can stifle in man *the search for meaning* and the desire for truth. Many consider this to be the best area to look for vocations.

We must help young people not to be resigned to mediocrity, by holding up to them great ideals, so that they too can ask the Lord: "Rabbi, where are you staying?" (Jn 1:38), "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17), and to open their hearts to generously following Christ.

This has been the experience of countless men and women who were able to become faithful witnesses to Christ, apostles of the Gospel on our continent. By sharing the difficulties and suffering of the people of their time, they have believed in the universal call to holiness and scaled the heights on the particular path assigned to them by the Spirit. Their choices and their charisms have left profound marks of goodness which must be deepened, so that the European Churches can continue to carry out their mission of evangelization, sanctification and human advancement in the next millennium as well.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of vocations, accompany this generous commitment, obtaining from the Lord abundant new vocations to serve the proclamation of the Gospel in every European nation.

With these wishes, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you and to your communities.

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