



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF SERRA INTERNATIONAL

Thursday, 7 December 2000

Dear Members of Serra International!

1. I am pleased to spend this intense spiritual moment with you during your Jubilee pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

I greet Archbishop Justin Francis Rigali of Saint Louis and thank him for the cordial words he addressed to me in your name. I extend my greeting to all of you who have come here from various nations.

You bring to this celebration the spiritual mark that distinguishes you: I refer to your particularly keen perception of the Christian life as a "vocation". "You did not choose me, but I chose you ..." (Jn 15: 16): these words spoken by Christ to the Apostles apply to every baptized person. We must recognize them with joy and gratitude. In coming to implore the grace of the Jubilee, you have come precisely to open yourselves with new readiness to the fundamental call you received in *Baptism* by renewing the radical choice of Christian integrity and holiness.

2. Your baptismal calling leads you towards others: it is essentially a missionary calling, as you have learned from the example of Bl. Junipero Serra, the great evangelizer of California. Following in his footsteps, you have come to share in the heartfelt concern of Christ himself: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few!" (Mt 9: 37; Lk 10: 2). How can we fail to feel the timeliness and urgency of these words! The horizon of the Lord's "harvest" is indeed limitless, if we consider not only the pastoral needs of the Church herself but also the immense number of people who still await the first proclamation of the Gospel. Amid all the complexity of the present time, now, at the dawn of a new millennium, we need to recognize the search for meaning - a real yet often silent search - which is spreading through society. There is an unexpressed sense of need for Christ rising up from young people, from the world of culture, and from the great ethical and social challenges of our time. In order to respond to this need, the whole Church must become completely

ministerial, a community of heralds and witnesses, rich in *labourers for the harvest*.

3. It is really God himself, the "Lord of the harvest", who chooses his labourers; his call is always undeserved and unexpected. And yet, in the mystery of God's covenant with us, we are called to cooperate with his providence, and to use the powerful tool which he has placed in our hands: *prayer!* This is what Jesus himself asked us to do: "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!" (Mt 9: 38).

Dear Serrans, you are committed in a special way to promoting vocations. Never forget that yours must be above all a *commitment to prayer*, prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful *key* to resolving the vocations question. But at the same time prayer for vocations is also a school of life, as I had occasion recently to point out: "By praying for vocations we learn to look with Gospel wisdom at the world and at each person's need for life and salvation; it is a way of sharing in Christ's love and compassion for all mankind ..." (*Message for the 38th World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 14 September 2000, n. 6).

4. Along with prayer, the work of fostering vocations also requires a constant effort to bring the need to people's attention through personal witness, so that God's call may encounter a ready hearing and generous response in those to whom it is directed. This is the aim of your efforts to spread an authentic *culture of vocations*.

The Christian community urgently needs to realize that promoting vocations is more than simply a matter of "programmes". It is something that touches the very mystery of the Church. Vocations in fact are relative to the very meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ, formed and enlivened by the Holy Spirit with all the wealth of his gifts. The Second Vatican Council reminded us of this: "In the building up of Christ's body there is a variety of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes his different gifts for the welfare of the Church" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 7). Within the People of God, there is a specific mission awaiting each one. Because the needs of the "harvest" are so great, all the members of God's People must grow in the awareness of "being called". Significant are the gifts and tasks associated with the involvement of Christians in the temporal order. These are above all the responsibility of the laity. But a relevance all their own belongs to the ministries directed to the guidance and growth in holiness of the ecclesial community, namely the priesthood and the consecrated life. As Serrans you understand this, and members of the laity that you are, you are committed to fostering such vocations.

5. Your commitment to fostering vocations, dear Serrans, fits into this ecclesial framework. Your dedication to it ensures that the problem of vocations does not remain a concern for pastors alone, but is brought to the attention of all, involving families and teachers in particular. And this is vitally important.

Continue to make your contribution to this goal, in full harmony with your Bishops. Be people of communion, supporting your priests with active affection. With your characteristic charity, reach out to the needs of vocations among the poor. The good that flows from this to the Church will be a pledge of abundant heavenly gifts, which I willingly invoke upon each one of you and upon your movement through the motherly intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin.

With these sentiments, I cordially bless you all.

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