



The Holy See

12TH WORLD YOUTH DAY

Prayer Vigil for Vocations

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 21 August 1997

*To the Most Reverend Louis-Marie Billé,
Archbishop of Aix, Arles and Embrun,
President of the French Bishops' Conference
for the Young People gathered at
Notre-Dame de Paris
on Thursday, 21 August 1997,
to reflect and pray for vocations.*

Dear Young People,

1. The heart of the Bishop of Rome turns to you who feel a call to follow Christ in the ministerial priesthood or in the consecrated life. You come before the Lord to ask him to send missionaries of the Gospel, to tell him of your desire to serve him, to revive the gift of God within you (cf. 2 Tm 1:6), and to show him your interior readiness: "Lord, what do you want from me?". You are gathered before Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Every cathedral is a place that bears a special meaning. It is the centre of the diocesan Church, the seat of the Bishop, entrusted with bringing together in unity all the local communities. In fact, it is around the Bishops, the Successors of the Apostles, that the Church is built, with Christ as the cornerstone.

With the Apostle, I exhort you: "therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election" (2 Pt 1:10). Listen to the Spirit; "it is he who makes the word alive and present, helping to grasp its worth and its demands" (*Message for World Vocations Day 1997, 2*). May your first

response before the Lord be to give thanks to him for your families and for the Christian communities which have helped you and sustained you by their presence and prayer in your human growth and in the maturation of your vocation.

The necessary premise of apostolic ministry and the consecrated life is your spiritual formation, by which your personality and your lives are unified. You will discover the importance of prayer for the Church and the world. I invite you to spend time in the company of the Lord to learn "to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit". (*Optatam Totius*, 8). Seek Christ by meditating faithfully on the word of God, in active participation in the mysteries of the Church, and in the first place in the Eucharist and the Divine Office (cf. *ibid.*). Through perfect chastity you wish to draw attention to the fact that God is to be preferred above all else without in the least disregarding the value of other human relationships, and that the person finds happiness in consecrating himself or herself to the Lord.

2. Dear seminarians,

During this evening you will meditate on the actions of Christ, servant of all, who, on Holy Thursday, instituted the Eucharist and the priesthood; his real presence is actualized in his Body and Blood, and his mercy is manifested in his forgiveness. You have heard God's call and you wish to follow him. It is a beautiful thing to desire to enter the ministerial priesthood, but it is right that God's call be confirmed by the Church, because it belongs to her to discern the quality of your vocation. Indeed Christ calls us through his Church, telling us in this way that we are only the recipients of his divine treasure and that the mission is a mandate from the Lord. This evening, you truly want to lay your lives before Christ and show him your desire to serve as he wishes. Readiness and forgetting one's self are the fundamental attitudes for all those who wish to do the will of the Lord.

3. For your Bishops you are the "apple of their eye" (*Gift and Mystery*, 10); the seminary is "a continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus, listening to his word, proceeding toward the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit for the mission" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 60). You are the joy of Bishops who judge the diocesan Church by the seminary and make themselves present through your educators. You are a gift for the Church that permits her to look with confidence to the future. The whole people of God rejoices when young men are willing to prepare themselves for the priesthood, which is indispensable for the Church's growth and sanctification.

4. During your years in the seminary, you are gathered by the Holy Spirit in a unique fraternity. This time of community life is a true experience of the Church which prepares you for life as part of the presbyterate, with all the diversity of charisms and sensibilities which that entails. Thus every day you will feel yourselves more and more as members of the diocesan Church. You must acquire an intellectual formation which will contribute to your knowledge of the mystery of Christ

and will prepare you to announce the gospel with a great love of the truth (cf. *Optatam Totius*, 14-15). With the support of the seminary community, you will attain genuine human maturity. Give yourselves to living the theological virtues and developing self-mastery and forming your character in order to be models of Christian life, practicing from now on what you will have to teach (cf. *Ritual of the Ordination of Priests*, 102; *Lumen Gentium*, 28). By the free and maturely considered choice of celibacy you will be able to manifest your total gift of self for the Lord and for the mission. Ordination identifies you sacramentally with Christ and confers a character which embraces your whole being.

5. Priests are not "to lord it over others and enjoy honours, but to devote themselves completely to the service of God and the pastoral ministry" (*Optatam Totius*, 9). This presupposes that you are imbued with the mystery of the Church and have a profound love for all people. "Each one possesses the Holy Spirit in the measure in which he loves the Church" (Saint Augustine, *Treatise on the Gospel of John*, 32, 8). You can only proclaim the Gospel to your fellow human beings if you are close to them and know human society from within, with its evolutions and its needs. At the same time, learn to work with the laity, whose human and spiritual influence will greatly enrich you (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 61-63; Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29-31). For we are all engaged in the same mission.

6. I invite you to live in a trustful relationship of obedience and communion with the Bishop of your Diocese: he is "the first representative of Christ in priestly formation" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 65); it is he who has the task, in collaboration with those responsible for vocations, of determining the place and the manner of your training. Leaving behind one's self to serve the Church and to follow Christ is accomplished by entrusting one's life and future into the hands of the Bishop, as symbolically takes place during ordination, in order to act in the perspective of pastoral charity. It is through obedience that we come to do the will of God. Such an attitude reinforces the sense of service and readiness for the ecclesial mission, and one's openness to the pastoral life of the diocese. You will thus be linked to the Bishop "in loyal cooperation, in harmony with your fellow-priests" (cf. *Optatam Totius*, 9).

7. Dear young people who are thinking about religious life or a commitment in an Institute of consecrated life:

The Church greatly esteems the consecrated life, of which Christ is the model (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 25). It is a great grace to have been chosen by the Lord. Through the practice of the evangelical counsels, through your life of prayer and the exercise of charity, you unveil to others the face of God and you actively participate in the advancement of God's people. You intend to give yourselves to the Lord with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Col 7:34), like the Apostles who left everything to stay with Christ and, like him, to be at the service of God and of the brethren. In this way you will help to manifest the mystery and the mission of the Church by the multiple charisms of spiritual and apostolic life given by the Holy Spirit, and you will make your own contribution to

the renewal of society. (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 1).

8. I invite you all to pray for those young people who, throughout the world, hear the call of the Lord and for those who may be afraid to answer that call. May they find educators at hand to guide them! May they perceive the grandeur of their vocation: to love Christ above all else as a call to freedom and happiness! Pray so that the Church may help you in your search and in arriving at a correct discernment! Pray so that Christian communities may always know how to pass on the call of the Lord to the younger generations! With me, thank the Lord "for the gift of a vocation, for the grace of priesthood, for priestly vocations throughout the world" (*Gift and Mystery*, 10)! Let us thank him for consecrated persons! Let us thank him for families, parishes and movements, the cradles of vocations!

Reaffirm your filial trust in the Mother of God, for ordained ministers and the entire Church have much to learn from Mary (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 43). Be true witnesses of faith and charity, ready to give your lives for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world. May God continue in you what he has already begun!

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