



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE XXXIX WORLD DAY
OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS**

21 APRIL 2002 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Theme: *"The vocation to holiness"*

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. To you all "*beloved of God and saints by vocation, grace and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rm 1,7). These words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians of Rome introduce the theme of the next World Day of Prayer for Vocations: "*The vocation to holiness*". Holiness! This is the grace and aim of every believer, as the Book of Leviticus reminds us: "*Be holy, because I, the Lord, your God, am Holy*" (19,2).

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* I invited all to place "*pastoral planning under the heading of holiness*", to express "the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity... The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction" (n. 31).

The main task of the Church is to lead Christians along the path of holiness, so that, illuminated by the intelligence of faith, they may learn to know and contemplate Christ's face and to rediscover in Him their own authentic identity and the mission that the Lord entrusts to each of them. In this way, they are "*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord*" (Eph 2,20-21).

The Church gathers within herself all the vocations God raises up among his sons and daughters and is transformed into a radiant reflection of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. As a people gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son

and the Holy Spirit, the Church carries within herself the mystery of the Father who calls everyone to praise His name and to fulfil His will; she preserves the mystery of the Son who, sent by the Father to announce the Reign of God, invites everyone to follow Him; she is the repository of the mystery of the Holy Spirit who consecrates for the mission those whom the Father has chosen through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Since the Christian Community is the place where all the various vocations raised up by the Lord express themselves, in the context of the World Day of Prayer that will take place on 21 April 2002, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Third Continental Congress for vocations to ordained ministry and to consecrated life in North America will be held. I gladly send my best wishes to its promoters and to the participants and express my heart-felt congratulations for an initiative that deals with one of the pivotal problems of the Church in America and of the new evangelisation of the continent. I invite everyone to pray, so that this important gathering may produce a renewed commitment to the service of vocations and a more generous enthusiasm among the Christians of the "New World".

2. The Church is *the "home of holiness"* and the charity of Christ, poured out by the Holy Spirit, is her soul. In her, all Christians help one another to discover and fulfil their own vocation by listening to the Word of God, in prayer, by assiduously participating in the Sacraments and incessantly seeking the face of Christ in every brother and sister. In this way each person, according to each one's gifts, advances along the path of faith, keeping hope alive and acting through charity (cf *Lumen gentium*, 41), while the Church "*reveals and experiences anew the infinite richness of the mystery of Jesus Christ*" (*Christifideles laici*, 55) and assures that the holiness of God is manifested within each state and situation of life, so that all Christians may become labourers in the vineyard of the Lord and build up the Body of Christ.

Every vocation in the Church is at the service of holiness. Some however, such as the vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life, are at the service of holiness in a thoroughly unique manner. It is to these vocations that I invite everyone to pay particular attention today, by intensifying their prayers for them.

The vocation to ordained ministry "*is essentially a call to holiness in the form which derives from the sacrament of Orders. Holiness is intimacy with God, it is the imitation of Christ, who was poor, chaste and humble; it is unreserved love for souls and a giving of oneself on their behalf and for their true good; it is love for the Church which is holy and wants us to be holy, because this is the mission that Christ entrusted to her*" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, 33). Jesus calls the Apostles "*to be his companions*" (Mk 3,14) in a privileged intimacy (cf Lk 8,1-2; 22,28). Not only does he share with them the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf Mt 13,16-18), but He expects a surpassing faithfulness from them, consonant with the Apostolic ministry to which He calls them. He demands a more rigorous poverty from them (cf Mt 19,22-23), the humility of a servant who becomes the last of all (cf Mt 20,25-27). He asks of them faith in the powers they received (cf Mt 17,19-21), prayer and fasting as effective tools of apostolate (cf Mk 9,29) and unselfishness: "*You received without pay, give without pay*" (Mt 10,8). From them He expects prudence together with simplicity and moral rectitude (cf Mt 10,26-28) and abandonment to Divine Providence (cf Lk 9,1-3; 19,22-23). They must also be aware of the responsibilities they assume, as they are administrators of the Sacraments established by the Master and labourers in His vineyard (cf Lk 12,43-48).

Consecrated life reveals the intimate nature of every Christian vocation to holiness, and the straining of the entire Church-Bride towards Christ "her only Spouse". "*The profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with*

the mystery of Christ, and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose and indicated as an absolute eschatological value" (Vita consecrata, 29). Vocations to these states of life are precious and necessary gifts, which demonstrate that, even today, the following of Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, the witness to the absolute primacy of God, and the service to humanity in the manner of the Redeemer represent privileged paths towards the fullness of spiritual life.

The small number of candidates to the priesthood and consecrated life reported in some situations today, must not lead us to expect less and settle for a mediocre formation and spirituality. Rather, it should urge greater attention to the selection and the formation of those who, once constituted ministers and witnesses of Christ, will be called upon to confirm with holiness of life, what they announce and celebrate.

3. It is necessary to adopt all means to ensure that vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, essential for the life and holiness of God's People, are continuously at the centre of spirituality, of pastoral action and of the prayer of the faithful.

May Bishops and priests be, first of all, witnesses to the holiness of the ministry they have received as gift. With their life and teaching, may they show the joy of following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and the renewing efficacy of the mystery of His Easter of Redemption. May they make visible by their example, in particular to the young generations, the inspiring adventure reserved for those who, in the footsteps of the Divine Master, choose to belong completely to God and offer themselves so that every person may have life and have it to the full (cf *Jn* 10,10).

May consecrated men and women, who live at "the very heart of the Church as a decisive element for her mission" (*Vita consecrata*, 3), show that their existence is firmly rooted in Christ, that religious life is the "home and school of communion" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 43), that in their humble and faithful service to mankind pulses that "creativity of charity" (*ibid.*, 50) which the Holy Spirit always keeps alive in the Church. Let us not forget that the strength of every vocation lies in the love for contemplation, in the joy of serving others, in chastity lived for the Kingdom of Heaven and in the generous devotion to one's own ministry!

Families are called to play a decisive role for the future of vocations in the Church. The holiness of marital love, the harmony of family life, the spirit of faith with which the problems of daily life are confronted, openness towards others, especially towards the poorest, and participation in the life of the Christian community form the proper environment for their children to listen to the divine call and make a generous response.

4. "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest" (*Mt* 9,38; *Lk* 10,2). In obedience to Christ's command, every World Day of Prayer for Vocations distinguishes itself as a moment of intense prayer, that absorbs the entire Christian community in an incessant and fervent invocation to God for vocations. How important it is for Christian communities to become *real schools of prayer* (cf *Novo millennio ineunte*, 33), capable of educating for dialogue with God and forming the faithful to open themselves ever more to the love with which the Father "so loved the world that he gave His only Son" (*Jn* 3,16)! Prayer, developed and lived, will help us to be guided by the Spirit of Christ to collaborate in building up the Church in charity. In this context, the disciple grows in an ardent desire that all may encounter Christ and achieve the true freedom of the children of God. This eagerness will lead the believer, following the example of Mary,

to be ready to pronounce a full and generous “yes” to the Lord who calls him or her to become a minister of the Word, the Sacraments and Charity, or to become a living sign of Christ’s chaste, poor and obedient life among the people of our time.

May the Lord of the harvest provide many holy priestly and religious vocations for His Church!

Holy Father, look upon this humanity of ours,
that is taking its first steps along the path of the Third Millennium.

Its life is still deeply marked
by hatred, violence and oppression,
but the thirst for justice, truth and grace
still finds a space in the hearts of many people,
who are waiting for someone to bring salvation,
enacted by You through Your Son Jesus.

There is the need for courageous heralds of the Gospel,
for generous servants of suffering humanity.

Send holy priests to Your Church, we pray,
who may sanctify Your people
with the tools of Your grace.

Send numerous consecrated men and women,
that they may show Your holiness in the midst of the world.

Send holy labourers into Your vineyard,
that they may labour with the fervour of charity
and, moved by Your Holy Spirit,
may bring the salvation of Christ
to the farthest ends of the Earth. Amen.

From Castel Gandolfo, 8th September 2001

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