



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR THE 37TH WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

14TH MAY 2000 - 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER Theme: **"The Eucharist, source of all vocations and ministries in the Church"** *Venerable brothers in the Episcopate,*

dearest brothers and sisters all over the world! The World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which will be celebrated in the joyful atmosphere of the Easter festivities, especially joyful because of the Jubilee celebrations, gives me the opportunity to reflect, together with you, on the gift of the divine call, sharing your care for vocations to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life. The theme that I intend to propose to you this year is one in harmony with the event of the Great Jubilee. I would like to meditate with you on: The Eucharist, source of all vocations and ministries in the Church. Is not perhaps the Eucharist the mystery of Christ, living and working in history? From the Eucharist, Jesus continues to call people to follow Him, and to offer everyone the "fullness of time."¹ "In the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman" (*Gal 4,4*)

"The fullness of time coincides with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word ... and with the mystery of the Redemption of the world" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, 1): in the Son, who is of one being with the Father and was made man in the womb of the Virgin, the awaited "time" has its beginning and end, the time of grace and mercy, the time of salvation and reconciliation.

Christ reveals the plan of God for all of creation and, in particular, for man. He "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear," (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22) a calling which is hidden in the heart of Him who is Eternal. The mystery of the incarnate Word will be fully revealed only when every man and every woman will be fulfilled in Him, sons in the Son, members of His mystical Body, which is the Church.

The Jubilee, and this one in particular, celebrating 2000 years of the coming in time of the Son of God and the mystery of redemption, enjoins all believers to consider their own personal vocation, to complete in their lives what is lacking in the passion of the Son, for the sake of His body, which is the Church. (cf. *Col 1,24*)². "When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised Him; and He vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?'" (*Lk 24, 30-32*)

The Eucharist constitutes the culminating moment in which Jesus, in His Body given for us and in His Blood poured out for our salvation, reveals the mystery of His identity and indicates the sense of the vocation of every believer. In fact, the meaning of human life is totally contained in that Body and in that Blood, since from them life and salvation have come to us. In some ways, the very existence of the human person must be identified with them, so that this existence is fulfilled

in so far as it can, in its turn, make of itself a gift for others.

In the Eucharist all this is mysteriously signified in the signs of bread and wine, the memorial of the Passover of the Lord: the believer who is nourished by that Body given for him and with that Blood poured out for him, receives the power to transform himself, in turn, into gift. As Saint Augustine says, "Be what you receive and receive what you are." (Discourse 272, 1: On Pentecost)

In their encounter with the Eucharist, some men discover that they are called to become ministers of the Altar, other people, that they are called to contemplate the beauty and depth of this mystery, others that they are called to pour out again its impelling force of love on the poor and weak, and others again that they are called to grasp its transforming power in the realities and gestures of everyday life. Each believer finds in the Eucharist not only the interpretative key of his or her own existence, but the courage to actualise it, indeed to build up, in the diversity of charisms and vocations, the one Body of Christ in history.

In the account of the disciples of Emmaus (*Lk 24, 13-35*), Saint Luke lets us glimpse what happens in the life of the person who lives the Eucharist. When "in the breaking of bread," done by the "stranger," the eyes of the disciples are opened, they realise that their hearts were burning in their breasts while they were listening to Him explaining the Scriptures. In those hearts that burn we can see the history and the discovery of every vocation, which is not a transient emotion, but an ever more certain and strong recognition that the Eucharist and Passover of the Son must become ever more the Eucharist and Passover of His disciples.³ "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." (*1 Jn 2, 14*)

The mystery of the love of God, "hidden for ages and generations," (*Col 1, 26*) is now revealed to us in the "word of the Cross," (*1 Cor 1, 18*) which, abiding in you, dearest young people, will be your strength and your light, and will unveil to you the mystery of your personal call. I know your doubts and your efforts, I see you lost at times, I understand the fear that assails you about the future. But yet, I have in my mind and in my heart the joyous image of the many encounters with you on my apostolic Journeys, in the course of which I have been able to verify the sincere search for truth and love that abides in each one of you.

The Lord Jesus has pitched His tent among us and, from this His Eucharistic dwelling, He repeats to each man and each woman, "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I shall give you rest." (*Mt 11, 28*)

Dear young people, go to meet Jesus the Saviour! Love Him and adore Him in the Eucharist! He is present in the Holy Mass, that sacramentally presents the sacrifice of the Cross. He comes into us in Holy Communion and remains in the tabernacles of our churches, because He is our friend, the friend of all, especially of you young people, who are so much in need of confidence and love. You are able to draw from Him the courage to be His apostles in this particular period of time: the twenty-first century will be how you young people will want it to be and will make it. After so much violence and oppression, the world needs young people capable of "building bridges" to unite and reconcile; after the culture of man without vocation, men and women are needed who believe in life and accept it as a call that comes from Above, from the God who calls, since He loves; after the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, which poisons human relationships, only courageous young people, with minds and hearts open to high and generous ideals, will be able to restore beauty and truth to life and to human relationships. Then this Jubilee time will truly be for all a "year of the Lord's grace," a Jubilee of vocation.⁴ "I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning." (*1 Jn 2, 13*)

Every vocation is a gift of the Father and, like all gifts which come from God, arrives through many human mediations: that of parents or teachers, of pastors of the Church, of people who are directly engaged in a ministry of vocations' animation, or that of the simple believer. I would like, with this message, to address myself to all these categories of

persons, to whom the discovery and support of the divine call is linked. I am aware that the pastoral care of vocations constitutes a less than easy ministry, but how can one not remember that there is nothing more uplifting than an enthusiastic witnessing to one's own vocation? He who lives this gift joyfully and nourishes it daily in his encounter with the Eucharist will know how to sow in the hearts of many young people the good seed of faithful adherence to the divine call. It is in the Eucharistic presence that Jesus reaches us, places us within the dynamism of ecclesial communion and makes us prophetic signs for the world.

I would like, here, to direct an affectionate and grateful thought to all those animators of vocations, priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay people who give of themselves generously and with enthusiasm in this arduous ministry. Do not let yourselves be discouraged by the difficulties - have trust! The seed of the divine call, when it is planted with generosity, will yield abundant fruit. Faced with the grave crisis of vocations to the ordained ministry and to the consecrated life that pervades some regions of the world, it is necessary, above all in this Jubilee of the Year 2000, to labour so that every priest, every consecrated person, rediscovers the beauty of their own vocation and witnesses it to others. Let every believer become an educator of vocations, without fearing to propose radical choices; let every community understand the centrality of the Eucharist and the necessity for ministers of the Eucharistic Sacrifice; let the whole People of God raise an ever more intense and impassioned prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest. And let them entrust this prayer to the intercession of her who is the Mother of the eternal Priest.⁵

Prayer Virgin Mary, humble daughter of the Most High,

in you the mystery of the divine call

was fulfilled in a marvellous way.

You are the image of what God accomplishes

in those who entrust themselves to Him;

in you the freedom of the Creator

raised up the freedom of the creature.

He who was born in your womb

has joined in one single will the salvific freedom of God

and the obedient assent of man.

Thanks to you, the call of God

is definitively joined with the response of the man-God.

First-fruits of a new life,

you keep for us all the generous "Yes" of joy and love.

Holy Mary, Mother of all who are called,

make all believers have the strength

to answer the divine call with generous courage,

and let them be joyful witnesses of love toward God

and toward their neighbour.

Young daughter of Sion, Star of the morning,

who guide the steps of humanity

through the Great Jubilee toward the future,

direct the young people of the new millennium

toward Him who is "the true light which enlightens all men." (*Jn* 1,9)

Amen!*From the Vatican, 30th September 1999.*
