



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION IN THE GROUNDS
OF THE PAPAL SEMINARY IN PUNE**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Monday, 10 February 1986

"I am the vine, you are the branches".

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. It is a special joy to celebrate the Eucharist with you here in the grounds of the Papal Seminary in Pune. This city is full of hope for the future of the Church in India. Also located here are novitiates and houses of formation of various religious institutes, as well as the National Vocation Service Centre. For the great gift of a divine call, for this wonderful sign of hope, and for all the vocations throughout India, we give thanks and praise to the Lord.

I am very happy to see before me such a large number of seminarians, as well as numerous young men and women who are preparing for consecrated life in religious or secular institutes. Looking at your nation, with the enormous challenges which it faces, who can fail to be conscious of the need for more labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, for zealous and dedicated labourers who will respond to these challenges in accordance with the mind and heart of Christ?

With great joy I greet all of you who are present at this Sacred Liturgy: my brother bishops from this region of India, my brother priests and all the men and women religious, and all the faithful people. I offer my greetings especially to the families who are the first to prepare the hearts of young people to respond generously to a vocation in the Church, and also to the superiors and the staff of the seminaries and religious houses who continue the all-important work of the formation begun at home.

2. I would now like to speak to the seminarians. Dear brothers and sons in Christ: as future priests in the world you are called to be spiritual leaders with a specific identity: men of the Church, men dedicated to prayer and to the word of God, men who wish to share humbly and generously in Christ's role of mediation.

Ours is a world that abounds in experts and leaders in countless areas of human existence. The Church's ministers are not called to play leadership roles in the secular spheres of society. India has many competent lay men and women to attend to these matters. You may be tempted to emulate the secular leadership because of its growing attractiveness in society today. You may at times feel irrelevant because your call is specifically spiritual. It is therefore urgently necessary for you to be convinced of the precious value of your vocation from God. This is especially true because in this country there has always been an abiding interest in spiritual things: in the *vidya* and *anubhav* of God, the knowledge and experience of God. This interest applies likewise to the religious vocation.

3. In the hidden recesses of the human heart the grace of a vocation takes the form of a dialogue. It is a dialogue between Christ and an individual, in which a personal invitation is given. Christ calls the person by name and says: "Come, follow me". This call, this mysterious inner voice of Christ, is heard most clearly in silence and prayer. Its acceptance is an act of faith.

A vocation is both a sign of love and an invitation to love. In the Gospel account of the conversation of Jesus with the young man, we are told that "Jesus looking upon him loved him". The Lord's call always demands a choice, a decision full awareness of one's freedom. The decision to say "yes" to Christ's call carries with it a number of important consequences: the need to give up other plans, a willingness to leave behind people who are dear, a readiness to set out with deep trust along the path that will lead to ever closer union with Christ.

The response of love to a vocation is well expressed by the Psalmist when he declares:

"I say to the Lord: You are my God.

My happiness lies in you alone,

O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup; it is you yourself who are my prize.

You will show me the path of life, the fullness of joy in your presence, at your right hand happiness for ever".

4. This grace calls for a response, that is, a conscious effort to "assimilate" a mystery which is both beyond understanding and at the same time revealed by God.

Every vocation is a call to enter more fully into the mystery of God. Theological and philosophical studies offer opportunities for a deeper knowledge of the person of Christ. But this deeper knowledge does not depend on our intellectual efforts alone: above all it is a gift of the Father who

through the Holy Spirit enables us to know the Son. Hence, in prayer and silence, you must learn to listen to the voice of God. A person must be conformed to Christ and not merely instructed in the faith.

Our whole conscious co-operation with the grace of a vocation must follow the programme outlined by Christ in the allegory of the true vine. Christ says: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser".

Your first priority is to live in union with Christ, to be one with him at all times, faithful to his invitation: "Abide in me, and I in you" . Only in this way can you bear abundant fruit for the Kingdom of God. Only by abiding in Christ can you accomplish great things in the Church today. For he says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing".

The time of religious or seminary formation is intended to deepen your union with Christ. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual and supernatural link of the branch with the vine must be strengthened; the individual who is called and Christ who calls must be more closely united. And this necessarily involves discipline and sacrifice: the discipline of study and prayer in particular, and the sacrifices which free our heart to embrace God's word eagerly and to give ourselves in service to others. This too is in accordance with Christ's words: "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit". So never doubt the Lord's love when you have to face hardships and suffering, for the Lord "prunes" those whom he loves, so that they may bear more fruit.

A condition for union with Christ is the total acceptance of his word, which in fact is communicated to us through the Sacred Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. The Church herself guards and presents this word of God in all its purity, integrity and power. By the action of the Holy Spirit, and through the charism of her Magisterium, she transmits the Gospel intact to each generation. A loving adherence to the authentic Magisterium guarantees the real possession of God's word, without which there can be no life-giving union with Christ. Fidelity to the Magisterium is also an indispensable condition for the proper interpretation of the "signs of the times".

5. Saint Paul, in the First Reading of this Liturgy, tells us about his own vocation from the Lord: "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". "To preach the unsearchable riches of Christ" – this was Saint Paul's vocation; it is a principal duty of the Church; it is a principal task of every priest.

Religious and seminary formation and training must always be based on this. During the years of their preparation, young people must profoundly assimilate "the unsearchable riches of Christ", in order to be able to make those riches accessible to others. You must assimilate them so that you can proclaim them with conviction in years to come. Your responsibility is to communicate Christ.

But you will be able to do this only if you have first experienced his love.

6. It is in this context that I now turn to you, dear parents, brothers and sisters, to all the members of the Christian family. The Christian home is not just a community of human life. The precious gift of human life must be complemented and enriched with the life of Christ. The family is rightly concerned with preserving human values, but it must also devote itself to the cultivation of Christian values.

Members of families can be tempted to think that it is only to priests and religious that the Church's responsibility is entrusted. But this is far from the truth. It is all in the home that children first learn what it means to be "partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel". As the Second Vatican Council taught: "Christian husbands and wives are co-operators in grace and witnesses of faith on behalf of each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them; by word and example they train their offspring for the Christian and apostolic life. They prudently help them in the choice of their vocation and carefully promote any religious calling which they may discern in them".

7. The Christian family is the first place where vocations develop. It is a seminary or novitiate in germ. This means that you, the parents, must deepen and cultivate your own Christian life continuously. Let us get rid of the false notion that Christianity is practised entirely in church. What happens in the liturgy must be carried over into daily life. It must be lived in the home. Then the home will become the place where life in Christ grows to maturity. Such a home is a real expression of the Church.

Bear in mind that vocations in the Church are fostered in families where priests and religious are respected and loved, where there is a real interest in the life of the local Church and the universal Church. Then, when it is time for your children to make their choice of a suitable way of life, they will think not only in terms of secular professions but will also consider the possibility of accepting a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life. In an age of growing materialism one may be tempted to forget about the possibility of such vocations. But this possibility is real. Such vocations are needed for the well-being of families and society. They are needed so that the Church can fulfil Christ's will.

8. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide".

Dear seminarians and aspirants to the consecrated life: the initiative in every true vocation comes from the Lord. It is not your own plans that you are following. A vocation is a call from God and it requires a free response on our part. It is Christ who chooses and appoints us to the task he intends. What we are about, then, is God's work, not our own. And God will see to it that the work is not only fruitful but that the fruit will last.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you". Christ also addresses these words to husbands and wives and to people who are called to lead a chaste single life in the Church. He addresses them to the whole Church in this ancient land of India. But in a particular way he addresses them to those whom he has destined for a special role of discipleship and of intercession for his Body, the Church. Let us, therefore, listen to Jesus as he says: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit... so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you".

Amen.

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