



The Holy See

MASS CELEBRATED AT THE ROMAN PARISH OF St MARY HOPE

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 19 January 1997

1. “*The Lord called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ and he said, ‘Here I am!’?*” (1 Sm 3:4).

This Sunday’s Liturgy of the Word presents the theme of vocation to us. It is described first of all in the first reading, taken from the First Book of Samuel. A short time ago we listened to the evocative story of the vocation of the prophet, whom God called by name, wakening him from his sleep. At first the young Samuel does not understand where this mysterious voice comes from. It is only later and gradually, and thanks to the explanation of the elderly priest, Eli, that he discovers that what he has heard is actually God’s voice. So then he replies immediately: “Speak, for your servant is listening” (ibid., 3:10).

We can say that *Samuel’s call has a paradigmatic meaning*, since it is the completion of a process that is repeated in every vocation. God’s voice in fact is heard with increasing clarity and the subject gradually acquires an awareness of its divine origin. With time the person called by God learns to be increasingly open to God’s word, ready to listen and to do his will in his own life. 2. The account of Samuel’s vocation in the context of the Old Testament corresponds, in a certain sense, to what St John writes about the vocation of the Apostles. The first to be called was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. It was he who led his brother to Christ, telling him: “We have found the Messiah” (Jn 1:42). When Jesus saw Simon, he said to him: “So you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter)” (ibid., 1:41).

In this brief but solemn description of the vocation of Jesus’ disciples the *theme of “searching” and “finding”* is foremost. The attitude of the two brothers, Andrew and Simon, shows that desire for the fulfilment of the prophecies which was an essential part of Old Testament faith. Israel was waiting for the promised Messiah; he was sought more zealously after John the Baptist began to

preach on the banks of the Jordan. The Baptist not only announced the imminent coming of the Messiah, but indicated his presence in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who had come to the Jordan to be baptized. The call of the first Apostles took place precisely in this context, that is, it sprang from the Baptists's faith in the Messiah now present among the People of God.

Today's responsorial psalm also speaks of the Messiah's coming into the world. This Sunday's liturgy puts the words of the psalmist on Jesus' lips: "Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me ... to do your will" (Ps 40 [39]:7-8). When the fullness of time had come, this presence of the Messiah announced by God in the prophetic books became a *historical reality in the mystery of the Incarnation*. Having only recently celebrated the Christmas season, a time of joy and festivity over the Saviour's birth, we all still have before our eyes and in our hearts the celebration of that fulfilment of the messianic prophecies on the night of Bethlehem. After the Christmas season, the liturgy now shows us the gradual beginning of Jesus' saving mission through the simple and direct accounts of the Apostles' vocation.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the parish of *St Mary of Hope*, I am pleased to be with you today to celebrate the Eucharist on this Sunday which falls in the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. I am sure that during these days, your parish will not fail to pray more insistently for this goal — Christian unity —which the Divine Redeemer has so much at heart.

I know that you have been waiting a long time for my Pastoral Visit. I greet you all with affection, starting with the Cardinal Vicar, Camillo Ruini, the Auxiliary Bishop of the area, Bishop Enzo Dieci, and Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, Rector Major of Salesians, whom we have the joy of having with us today. I also greet the parish priest, Fr Stelvio Tonnini, together with the parochial vicars and all the sons and daughters of Don Bosco, who have worked so generously in this community since its foundation.

My thoughts also turn to the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts, founded by Fr Variara, to the members of the various organizations of pastoral participation, to the representatives of the many active parish groups, to so many lay people involved in one way or another in the various activities of your parish.

You live in a large metropolitan area, where the problems might seem to be less serious than in other parts of Rome. However, here too people must daily face inconveniences, such as the problem of spending the whole day far from one's own home, with negative consequences for family life and for forming true friendships in one's neighbourhood. In this context the parish, which is the only gathering place, has an important role. With its various and well-organized activities, *it becomes a suitable place for a spiritual, formative, cultural and recreational journey for all*.

Your community now has a large and beautiful place of worship, strongly desired by all of you and, especially, by the late Rector Major of the Salesian Society, Fr Egidio Viganò, whom we remember

with special affection in this Eucharist. Before the consecration of this church, which took place about a year ago, the parish was hosted for some years by the nearby *Pontifical Salesian University*. I thank those in charge and the teachers of the Salesian University not only for the hospitality they offered your parish community for many years, but also for the generous theological, pastoral and cultural service they offer the Diocese of Rome and the whole Church.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, during our meeting I have been able to observe how the *pastoral care of young people*, so important to St John Bosco, is given special attention in your parish. There are so many projects and paths offered to them, such as the Oratory-Youth Centre, which has 80 people of all ages on its formation staff, who give the whole parish community a note of liveliness and energy.

I know that you are seriously preparing for the celebration of the *great city mission*. Only yesterday was the letter published, which I addressed to all Romans on Christmas Day to present them with the Gospel of Mark: it will also be given to every family in this community. In that letter I stressed how there is no news so surprising as that contained in the Gospel: “God himself — in Jesus —reached out to us personally; he became one of us; he was crucified and rose from the dead and calls us all to share in his life for ever”. I urge you to take this joyful news to those who are not with us here today; take it to all the boys and girls, to the families, people who are alone, the elderly and the sick. Offer everyone the Good News of the Gospel, so that, like the Apostle Andrew, they can say: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41).

5. “*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?*” (1 Cor 6:15, 19). These words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians deserve special reflection, because they describe the Christian vocation. Yes, the Holy Spirit is present in each one of us, and we have received him from God. Therefore, we no longer belong to ourselves (cf. 1 Cor 6:19), because we have been bought “with a price” (cf. *ibid.*, 6:23).

Paul wants to make the Corinthians, to whom his Letter is addressed, aware of this truth: man belongs to God, first of all because he is one of God’s creatures, but more especially because he was redeemed from sin through Christ. To become aware of this means to reach *the very roots of every vocation*.

This is true in the first place for the Christian vocation and, on this basis, it is true for every particular vocation: for the priesthood, the religious life, marriage, and indeed for every other vocation connected with various activities and professions such as that of the doctor, engineer, artist, teacher, etc. For a Christian all these special vocations have their foundation in the great mystery of the Redemption.

Precisely because he has been redeemed by Christ and become the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, every Christian can find in himself those various talents and charisms that allow him to

develop his life creatively. He is thus able to serve God and his brothers and sisters, suitably responding to his particular vocation in the Christian community and in the social context in which he lives. I hope that you will all be aware of the dignity of your Christian vocation, attentive to the voice of God who calls and generous in proclaiming his saving presence to your brothers and sisters.

Speak, Lord, because we, your servants, are ready to listen to you!

“You alone have the words of eternal life” (cf. Gospel acclamation).

Amen!

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