



The Holy See

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

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters of the entire world!*

1. "The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). This is what we hear in the Liturgy of the Fourth Sunday of the Easter Season; and, in fact, each community, when it sees a growth in the number those who discover the hidden treasure of the heavenly kingdom and leave everything to dedicate themselves entirely to the things of the Lord (cf. Mt 13:44), feels itself overflowing with the joy which comes from the word of God and from the mysterious action of his Spirit.

Comforted, therefore, by these words from the Sacred Scripture and from this experience, the Church celebrates each year a special Day of Prayer for Vocations, confident in the promise that whatever she asks the Father in the name of Lord he will give her (cf. Jn 16:23).

Considering this upcoming celebration, this year I wish to invite you to pray that the Holy Spirit lead a growing number of faithful, especially young people, to commit themselves in the love of God with all their heart, all their soul and all their strength (cf. Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30), to serve him in those particular forms of Christian life which are carried out *in religious consecration*. This is expressed in various ways, be it in the priestly state, in the profession of vows, in the choice of monasteries or apostolic communities, or in the secular state.

2. The Second Vatican Council recognized that this "special gift" is a sign of election, since it permits those who welcome it to conform themselves more deeply to "that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 46).

My revered predecessor Paul VI was able to affirm that the consecrated life is a "privileged

testimony of a constant seeking for God, of an undivided love of Christ alone, and of an absolute dedication to the growth of his kingdom. Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that charity would grow cold, the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the 'salt' of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularization" (Ap. Exhort. *Evangelica testificatio*, n. 3).

The vocation of consecrated persons, in fact, requires the active proclamation of the Gospel in apostolic works and in services of charity which correspond to an authentically ecclesial way of acting.

The Church, in the course of her history, has always been enlivened and supported by many men and women religious, witnesses of unlimited love for the Lord Jesus, while in times closer to us she has received valuable aid from many consecrated persons who, living in the world, have desired to be for the world the leaven of sanctification and the yeast for initiatives inspired by the Gospel.

3. We must strongly state that even today there is need for the testimony of consecrated life, so that mankind will never forget that its true dimension is the eternal one. Mankind is destined to inhabit "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pt 3:13), and proclaim that true happiness is found only in the infinite love of God.

How much poorer would our world be if the presence of those consecrated to this Love would be weakened; and how much poorer would society be if it was not led to raise its gaze to the heavens where true joy is to be found!

The Church, also, would be much poorer if there were fewer who would manifest concretely and firmly the perennial validity of the gift of one's own life for the kingdom of Heaven.

The Christian people needs men and women, who in offering themselves to the Lord, find the full justification of their very existence and in this way assume the duty to be the "light of the peoples" and "salt of the earth", builders of hope to those who question them about the perennial newness of the Christian ideal.

4. We cannot deny that in some areas the number of those ready to consecrate themselves to Christ is diminishing. From this we see the need for an increasing commitment to prayer and initiatives able to prevent this crisis from having grave consequences for the people of God.

Therefore, I invite my *brothers in the Episcopate* to promote, especially among the clergy and laity, knowledge of and high esteem for the consecrated life. In seminaries, above all, they should assure that courses and instruction on the value of religious consecration are not lacking.

Secondly, *I exhort priests* not to fail to propose to young people this high and noble ideal. We all know how important the work of a spiritual guide is so that the seeds of vocation planted generously by grace may grow and mature.

To catechists I recommend the presentation, with consistent solidarity in doctrine, of this divine gift which the Lord has given to his Church.

To parents I say, trusting in their Christian sensitivity nourished by a living faith, that they can taste the joy of the divine gift which enters their home if a son or daughter is called by the Lord into his service.

To theologians and writers of religious disciplines, I address a warm invitation to present in a good light, according to the Catholic tradition, the theological significance of the consecrated life.

To educators I recommend that they frequently present the great figures of consecrated life, religious and secular, who have served the Church and society in various fields.

To religious families and to institutes of secular life I mention that the first and most constructive vocational apostolate is personal witness, when it is expressed with a life full of joy in service of the Lord.

I also exhort members of *institutes of contemplative life* to consider that the true secret of the spiritual renewal and apostolic fruitfulness of consecrated life has its roots in their prayer. Rich is the spiritual and doctrinal patrimony which contemplatives possess, while the world seeks in that richness a response to the questions constantly raised by our age.

But most of all I address the youth of today, and I say to them: "Let yourselves be seduced by the Eternal One", repeating the words of the ancient prophet: "You duped me, O Lord ... you were too strong for me and you triumphed" (Jer 20:7).

Let yourselves be charmed by Christ, the Infinite who appeared among you in visible and imitable form. Let yourselves be attracted by his example, which has changed the history of the world and directed it toward an exhilarating goal. Let yourselves be loved by the love of the Holy Spirit, who wishes to turn you away from worldly things to begin in you the life of the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and true holiness (cf. Eph 4:24).

Fall in love with Jesus Christ, to live his very life, so that our world may have life in the light of the Gospel.

5. We entrust to the Virgin Mary the great cause of consecrated life. Following the invitation of her words, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5), we ask the Mother of Vocations:

O Virgin Mary, to you we commend our young people, in particular the youth called to follow your Son more closely.

You know the difficulties, the struggles, the obstacles they must face.

Assist them to utter their "yes" to the divine call, as you did at the invitation of the angel.

Draw them to your heart so that they can understand with you the beauty and the joy that awaits them when the Omnipotent calls them into his intimacy, to make them witnesses of his Love and make them able to inspire the Church with their consecration.

O Virgin Mary, help us to rejoice with you in seeing the love brought by your Son received, treasured and returned. Grant that we may see even in our own days the wonders of the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit.

With my Blessing.

From the Vatican, 1 November 1991, the Solemnity of All Saints, the fourteenth year of my Pontificate