



The Holy See

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

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear sons and daughters throughout the world.*

This is the first time that the new Pope is speaking to you on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

In the first place, let my and your affectionate and grateful remembrance go to the late Pope Paul VI. We are grateful, because during the Council he established this Day of prayer for all vocations to special consecration to God and the Church. We are grateful, because every year, for fifteen years, he highlighted this Day with his words as a Teacher, and encouraged us with his Pastor's heart.

Following his example, I now turn to you on this sixteenth World Day, to confide to you a number of things that I have very much at heart, almost like three passwords: pray, call, respond.

1. First of all, *Pray*. The reason why we must pray is certainly a big one, if Christ himself commanded us to do it: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9: 38). Let this Day be a public witness of faith and obedience to the Lord's command. So celebrate it in your Cathedrals: the Bishops together with the clergy, the men and women religious, the missionaries, those aspiring to the priesthood and the consecrated life, the people, the young people, many young people. Celebrate it in the parishes, communities, shrines, colleges and the places where there are people who are suffering. From every part of the world let this insistent prayer rise to heaven, to ask the Father what Christ wanted us to ask.

Let it be a Day full of hope. May it find us gathered together, as though in a worldwide Upper Room, "in continuous prayer, together with... Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14), confidently awaiting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In fact, on the altar of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, round which we

gather in prayer, it is the same Christ who prays with us and for us, and assures us that we shall obtain what we ask for: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18: 19 f). There are many of us gathered in his name, and we ask only for what he wants. In view of his solemn promise, how can we fail to pray with minds full of hope?

Let this Day be a centre of spiritual radiation. Let our prayer spread out and continue in the churches, communities, families, the hearts of the faithful, as though in an invisible monastery from which an unbroken invocation rises to the Lord.

2. *Call*. I would now like to speak to you, Brothers in the Episcopate, and to your collaborators in the priesthood, in order to strengthen and encourage you in the ministry which you are already laudably exercising. Let us be faithful to the Council, which exhorted Bishops to "foster priestly and religious vocations as much as possible, and take a special interest in missionary vocations" (*Christus Dominus*, 15).

Christ, who commanded prayer for the labourers in the harvest, has also personally called those labourers. The words of his call are preserved in the treasure of the Gospel: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). "Come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). "If anyone serves me, he must follow me" (Jn 12:26). The words of his call are entrusted to our apostolic ministry and we must make them heard, like the other words of the Gospel, "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is Christ's will that we would make them heard. The People of God have a right to hear them from us.

The admirable pastoral programmes of the individual churches, the organizations for vocations that, in accordance with the Council, have the task of promoting all pastoral activity for vocations (cf. Decree *Optatam Totius*, 2), open the way and prepare the good ground for the Lord's grace. God is always free to call whom he wishes and when he wishes, in accordance with "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7). But usually he calls by means of us and our words. So, do not be afraid to call. Go among your young people. Go and meet them personally and call them. The hearts of many young people, and not so young people, are ready to listen to you. Many of them are looking for something to live for; they are waiting to discover a worthwhile mission, to devote their lives to it. Christ has attuned them to his call and yours. We must call. The Lord will do the rest, he who offers each individual his or her special gift, according to the grace that has been given to that person (cf. 1 Cor 7:7, and Rom 12:6).

Let us carry out this ministry wholeheartedly. Let us open our minds, as the Council wishes, "to transcend the boundaries of each diocese, nation, religious community, and rite. Responding to the needs of the whole Church, special help should be given to those places where workers for the Lord's vineyard are more urgently called for" (Decree *Optatam Totius*, 2). What I have said to the

Bishops and their cooperators in the priestly order I would also like to say to Religious Superiors, to the heads of Secular institutes, and to the leaders of missionary life, so that each one can play his or her part, according to individual responsibilities, with a view to the general good of the Church.

3. *Respond.* I am speaking in a special way to you, the young people. In fact I would like to talk with you, with each one of you. You are very dear to me and I have great confidence in you. I have called you the hope of the Church and my hope.

Let us remind ourselves of a few things together. In the treasure of the Gospel there are preserved the beautiful responses given to the Lord when he called. The response of Peter and Andrew his brother: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4:20). The response of Levi the publican: "And he left everything, and rose and followed him" (Lk 5:28). The response of the Apostles: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). The response of Saul: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). From the time when the Gospel was first proclaimed right up to our time, a very large number of men and women have given their personal response, their free and deliberate response, to the call of Christ. They have chosen the priesthood, the religious life, life in the Missions, as the reason for and the ideal of existence. They have served the People of God and humanity, with faith, intelligence, courage and love. Now it is time for you. It is up to you to respond. Are you afraid, perhaps?

Then let us reflect together, in the light of faith. Our life is a gift from God. We must do something good with it. There are many ways of living life well, using it for serving human and Christian ideals. My reason for speaking to you today about total dedication to God in the priesthood, in the religious life, in life as a missionary, is that Christ calls many from among you to this extraordinary adventure. He needs, and he wants to need, your persons, your intelligence, your energy, your faith, your love, your holiness. If it is to the priesthood that Christ is calling you, it is because he wishes to exercise his priesthood through your dedication and priestly mission. He wants to speak to the people of today through your voice. He wants to consecrate the Eucharist and forgive sins through you. He wants to live with your heart. He wants to help with your hands. He wants to save through your efforts. Think about it carefully. The response that many of you can give is given personally to Christ, who is calling you to these great things.

You will meet difficulties. Do you think perhaps that I do not know about them? I am telling you that love overcomes all difficulties. The true response to every vocation is the work of love. The response to the priestly, religious and missionary vocation can only spring from a deep love of Christ. He himself offers you this power of love, as a gift that is added to the gift of his call and makes your response possible. Trust in "him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we wish or think" (Eph 3:20). And, if you can, give your life, with joy and without fear, to him who first gave his for you.

For this reason I ask you to pray like this:

"Lord Jesus, who called the ones you wanted to call, call many of us to work for you, to work with you.

"You, who enlightened with your words those whom you called, enlighten us with faith in you.

"You, who supported them in their difficulties, help us to conquer the difficulties we have as young people today.

"And if you call one of us to be consecrated completely to you, may your love give warmth to this vocation from its very beginning and make it grow and persevere to the end. Amen."

I entrust these wishes and this prayer to the powerful intercession of Mary, Queen of Apostles, in the hope that those who are called will be able to discern and follow generously the voice of the Divine Master, and I invoke upon you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, and upon you, dear sons and daughters of the whole Church, the gifts of the Redeemer's peace and serenity. And with all my heart I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 6 January, Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany, in the year 1979, the first of the Pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II