



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECREE "APOSTOLICAM  
ACTUOSITATEM"**

*To my Venerable Brother  
Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

I extend my cordial greeting to you, Cardinal, and to all participants in the Day of Study organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, in collaboration with the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, on the topic *Vocation and Mission of the Laity, Fifty Years after the Decree "Apostolicam Actuositatem"*.

Your Conference takes place within the framework of the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. That extraordinary event of grace that, as Bl. Paul VI affirmed, had "the character of an act of love; of a great and threefold act of love: toward God, toward the Church, toward humanity" (*Allocution at the Beginning of the Fourth Session*, 14 September, 1965: *Insegnamenti*, III [1965], 475). This renewed attitude of love that inspired the Council Fathers also bore, among its many fruits, a new way of looking at the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, which found magnificent expression first and foremost in the two great Conciliar Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. These fundamental documents of the Council consider the lay faithful within an overall vision of whole of the People of God, to which they belong together with the members of holy orders and religious, and in which they share, in their own way, in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ himself. Hence, the Council did not see the laity as if they were members of a "second order", at the service of the hierarchy and simple executors of higher orders, but as disciples of Christ who, by virtue of their Baptism and of their natural insertion "in the world", are called to enliven every environment, every activity, every human relationship according to the spirit of the Gospel (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31), bringing light, hope, and the charity received from Christ to those places that otherwise would remain foreign to God's action and abandoned to the misery of the human condition (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*,

37). There is no one more appropriate than they to carry out the essential task of seeing “that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city” (cf. *ibid.*, 43).

In the broader context of this Conciliar Doctrine is the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which more closely addresses the nature and realms of the apostolate of the laity. This document firmly calls to mind that “a Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate” (n. 2), therefore the proclamation of the Gospel is not reserved to certain “mission professionals”, but must be the profound yearning of all the lay faithful, who are called, by virtue of their Baptism, not only to reform the temporal reality in the Christian spirit, but also to works of explicit evangelization, proclamation and the sanctification of men (cf. *ibid.*).

One might say that all this Conciliar teaching has made the formation of the laity grow within the Church, which up to now has already borne so many fruits. However, Vatican II, as every Council, calls on every generation of pastors and laity, because it is an inestimable gift of the Holy Spirit, which is received with gratitude and a sense of responsibility: all that has been given to us by the Spirit and passed on by Mother Church is always to be newly understood, assimilated, and brought down to reality! To implement the teaching of the Council and take it to the daily life of every Christian community: this was the pastoral concern that always inspired St John Paul II, as Bishop and as Pope. During the Great Jubilee of 2000, he said: “A new season is dawning before our eyes: it is time for deep reflection on the Council’s teaching, time to harvest all that the Council Fathers sowed and the generation of recent years has tended and awaited. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was truly a prophetic message for the Church’s life; it will continue to be so for many years in the third millennium which has just begun” (*Address to the International Study Convention on the Implementation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, 27 February 2000: *Insegnamenti*, XXIII, 1 [2000], 278).

I pray to the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, that your Congress will be an impetus for all — pastors and lay faithful — to have at heart the same concern to live and implement the teachings of the Council and to bring the light of Christ to the world. I ask you to please pray for me and with affection I bless you.

*From the Vatican, 22 October 2015*

*In memory of St John Paul II*

**FRANCISCUS**

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