



The Holy See

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

Dear Brother Bishops,

Dear Brothers and Sisters throughout the world!

Recognizing that every vocation is a gift from God which must be implored by prayer and merited by the witness of a holy life, again this year I invite the great family of Catholics to take part spiritually in the 28th World Day of Prayer for Vocations which we will celebrate on 21 April 1991.

For some time now, this Day has become a special occasion for reflection not only on the vocation to the priesthood and to the consecrated life, but also on the duty of the entire Christian community to foster the birth of these vocations and to cooperate in the awareness, discernment and maturing of God's interior call (cf. *Optatam Totius* 2).

This year I wish to draw your attention to catechesis, which is so essential a part of the religious experience of every Christian. Catechesis is basic to any authentic and free dialogue about vocation with God our Heavenly Father. In her catechesis, the Church helps the faithful, through a journey of faith and conversion, to hear God's word with an attitude of responsibility and of generous willingness to embrace its intrinsic demands. In this way, the Church wishes to stimulate a personal encounter with God by forming attentive disciples of the Lord and sharers in her universal mission. Catechesis thus appears as the appropriate way not only of discovering God's overall saving plan and the ultimate meaning of existence and history, but also of discovering the particular plan which God has for each individual in view of the coming of his Kingdom into the world.

"Catechesis aims therefore at developing understanding of the mystery of Christ in the light of God's word, so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word. Changed by the working of grace into a new creature, the Christian thus sets himself to follow Christ, and learns more and more within the Church to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity

with his commandments, and to hope as he invites us to" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 20).

Catechesis fulfils one of its essential aims when it becomes a school of prayer, thus enabling individuals to undertake a loving dialogue with God our Creator and Father, with Jesus Christ our Teacher and Saviour, and with the Holy Spirit the giver of life. Thanks to such a dialogue, what is heard and learned remains not only in the mind but wins over the heart and seeks to be translated into action. For catechesis cannot be content with proclaiming the truths of the faith, but must also aim at evoking a response, so that each person will assume his or her own role in God's plan of salvation and will become open to offering his or her own life for the mission of the Church. This may well involve a readiness to follow Christ more closely in the ministerial priesthood or in the consecrated life.

Believers, especially young people, should be helped to understand that the Christian life is above all a response to God's call. Within this perspective, they should also be helped to recognize the special character and the importance for God's Kingdom of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, and missionary service, as well as the vocation to the consecrated life in the world.

In this context, catechists must realize their responsibility to the Church and to those who hear the message. Their teaching, which seeks to lead the people of today to a discovery of the God of Love as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, will lead children and young people to think about every Christian's duty to help the Church fulfil her mission. This mission can only be carried out through the various ministries and charisms which the Church has received from the Holy Spirit. Catechesis will seek to help young people to discover that the ministerial priesthood is a magnificent and totally free gift, given by God to the Church, through a more deeply rooted communion in the priesthood of Jesus Christ himself (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10). Catechetical teaching will also place in its proper light the value of virginity and ecclesiastical celibacy as ways of life inspired by the Gospel which lead to a total consecration to God and to the Church and which make Christian spiritual love even more fruitful (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12).

Those responsible for catechesis should always respect the proclamation of the Gospel in its fullness, which includes the call to follow Christ ever more closely. They should wisely do what my predecessor Pope Paul VI asked in his last Message for the World Day of Prayer: "Make these realities known, teach these truths, make them easy to understand, stimulating and attractive, as Jesus the Teacher and Shepherd did. Let no one be ignorant, through our fault, of what he or she should know in order to give a different and better direction to his or her life" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 13 April 1978, p. 4).

I wish my words to reach all those whom the Holy Spirit calls to cooperate with him: Christian parents, priests, religious and the many lay people involved in education. I especially desire that this exhortation should reach the hearts and minds of the many catechists who generously collaborate with the Church's Pastors in all the particular Churches in the great work of

evangelizing each new generation.

Dear catechists, how important and delicate your mission is! The children and young people entrusted to you depend on your service for their growth and development as Christians. In the Church, catechesis is needed so that the word of God, the Sacraments, the Liturgy and the duties proper to the Christian life may be properly known. But there is also a need, especially at certain moments of young people's development, for a catechesis which offers guidance in choosing a state of life. For only in the light of faith and of prayer can we grasp the meaning and the power of God's individual calls.

May your ministry as catechists be carried out in faith, nourished by prayer and sustained by genuine Christian living. May you become experts in speaking to today's young people, and may you be effective and credible teachers in presenting the Gospel ideal as a universal vocation and in shedding light on the meaning and value of the various vocations to the consecrated life.

I ask Bishops and Priests to stress the vocational dimension of catechesis, and in particular to provide for the spiritual and cultural training of catechists and to support their work for vocations with the powerful witness of lives rich in pastoral holiness.

I appeal to Religious Families, both men and women, to devote the best part of their resources and their abilities to the specific work of catechesis, and to play their part in ensuring that catechesis is not an isolated endeavour but part of a full and well-organized pastoral plan. God's Providence has always abundantly repaid efforts spent on catechesis with the gift of new and holy vocations. I especially encourage those Religious who teach in and administer Catholic schools to highlight within their general educational programme the value of a vocation to the priesthood, religious life and missionary work.

I urge parents to cooperate with catechists by providing a family environment rooted in faith and prayer, so as to guide their children's whole lives in accordance with the demands of the Christian vocation. Each particular vocation is, in fact, a great gift of God which comes into their home.

Finally, the entire Christian community, with authentic missionary fervour, should recognize the seeds of vocation which the Holy Spirit never ceases to sow in human hearts, and it should strive to create, especially by unremitting and trusting prayer, a climate which will help adolescents and young people to hear God's voice and respond to it with generosity and courage.

"O Jesus, Good Shepherd of the Church, we entrust our catechists to you. Under the guidance of the Bishops and priests, may they help those entrusted to them to discover the true meaning of the Christian life as a vocation, so that, open and attentive to your voice, they may follow you generously.

"Bless our parishes. Make them living communities where prayer and liturgical life, attentive and faith-filled hearing of your word and generous and fruitful charity may become the fertile field for an abundant harvest of vocations.

"O Mary, Queen of the Apostles, bless our young people. Help them to share in your own openness to God's voice. Help them to imitate you in saying their own generous and unconditional 'yes' to the mystery of love and divine election to which the Lord calls them."

From the Vatican, on 4 October, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the year 1990, the twelfth of my Pontificate.