



The Holy See

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

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters throughout the World,*

"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9:38). With these words of the Lord I address myself to the whole Church, which on next 7 May, the Fourth Sunday of Eastertide, will celebrate the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations on the theme: "Pastoral care of young people and pastoral care of vocations are complementary".

1. Ten years have now passed since the United Nations Organization proclaimed 1985 as "International Year of Youth". On that occasion I sent a letter to the young men and women of the world to fix with them the joyful annual appointment of the World Youth Day.

At the conclusion of the decade I wish to give thanks to the Lord for the hope which that initiative sowed and caused to grow in the hearts of young people, and, on the occasion of the next World Day of Prayer for Vocations, *I invite all to reflect on the close relationship which connects the pastoral care of young people and the pastoral care of vocations.*

Having, on various occasions, called upon young people throughout the world to meditate on Christ's meeting with the young man (cf. Mk 10:17-22; Mt 19:16-22; Lk 18:18-23), I have already had the opportunity to underline that youth attains its true richness when it is seen principally as a time of vocational reflection.

The young man's question: "What must I do to have eternal life?" uncovers a constitutive dimension of youth itself. The young man means, in fact: "What must I do so that my life may have meaning? What is God's plan for my life? What is his will?".

The dialogue which grows out of the young man's question offers Jesus the occasion to reveal the special intensity with which God loves those who are able to pose for themselves in vocational terms the question about their own future: "Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him". The one who lives with this vocational tension, taking it seriously, finds in the heart of Christ a care which is full of tenderness. A little later Jesus also reveals God's response to whoever lives his or her own youth as a favourable time of spiritual orientation. The response is: "Follow me!".

It is in following Jesus that youth displays all the richness of its potentiality and acquires its full meaning.

It is in following Jesus that the young discover the sense of a life lived as a gift of self, and experience the beauty and truth of growing in love.

It is in following Jesus that they feel themselves called to communion with him as living members of a single body, which is the Church.

It is in following Jesus that it will be possible for them to understand the personal call to love: in matrimony, in the consecrated life, in the ordained ministry, in the mission *ad gentes*.

2. That dialogue shows however that Jesus' care and tenderness can remain unanswered. And what is sad is the inheritance of life choices which distance us from him.

How many motives, even today, hold back adolescents and young people from living the truth of their age in generous adherence to Christ. How many still do not know of whom to ask that question the "rich young man" put to Jesus! How many people's young days are at risk of losing out on an authentic growth!

And yet how many expectations! The desire to give a meaning to its existence remains strong in the heart of every new generation. In the course of their journey young people look for someone who will know how to speak with them about the problems which worry them and to propose solutions, values, perspectives which are worth staking one's future on.

What is needed today is *a Church which knows how to respond to the expectations of young people*. Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them and, through his Body which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice which will require a commitment of their lives. As Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become today the traveling companion of young people, who are often marked by confusion, resistance and contradictions, in order to announce to them the ever-astonishing "news" of the risen Christ.

This is what is needed: *a Church for young people*, which will know how to speak to their heart and enkindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in it with the joy of the Gospel and the strength of

the Eucharist; a Church which will know how to invite and to welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence; a Church which is not afraid to require much, after having given much; which does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure, such as that of the following of the Gospel.

3. This commitment of the Church for young people, with the necessary attention to elements of a pedagogical and methodological order, can in no way fail to acknowledge that pastoral care of the various vocations is a primary duty. Nor can it fail to pay constant and specific attention to vocations to the ordained ministry and to the life of special consecration, which of their nature require a particular care.

A plan of pastoral care of young people cannot but have as its ultimate objective the maturation of a deep, decisive personal dialogue of the young man or young woman with the Lord. The vocational dimension is thus an integral part of the pastoral care of the young, to the point that one can say in synthesis: *the specific pastoral care of vocations finds its vital context in the pastoral care of youth, and this pastoral care of young people is complete and efficacious when it is open to the vocational dimension.*

A natural predisposition for the discovery of what is new, what is true, beautiful and good manifests itself with adolescence; at this age the first experiences which will mark the stages of growth towards the interiorization of faith take place. *The Christian community* has much to say and to give to the young people who are living these new experiences, precisely because the Gospel of vocation can give a response to the questions, to the expectations and to adolescent and youthful restlessness. *The Christian community* is the guardian and messenger of this response, because it is sent by the Lord to reveal the ultimate meaning of life to the adolescent and the young person, thereby directing him to the discovery of his own vocation within the context of daily life. Every life, in fact, shows itself to be a vocation to be known and followed, because an existence without a vocation can never be authentic.

The Christian community is called to make possible the meeting of the young person with Jesus, making itself the mediator of the call and the teacher of the response which he awaits. It has the mission of bringing young people to the discovery of their personal call to be Church. *The Christian community* is thus the natural setting in which young people can complete their educational journey, discovering the greatest riches of their particular age and responding to that vocation which the God of life, from the creation of the world, has provided for each one.

4. The paths of the pastoral care of the young, conceived and put into effect in the particular Churches, in parish communities, in Church organizations and in institutes of consecrated life cannot fail to take into account this objective and these ideas.

It is the task of educators, in the fulfilment of their respective roles, to guide the maturation of

different vocations, giving particular attention to vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life. Even if their activity does not directly bring about a response, it can, however, facilitate it, at times to the point of making it possible. The fruit is always something new, original and fundamentally gratuitous: in the course of its coming into being, this fruit is exposed to all the uncertainties of any growth. In this regard, one must reject the temptation to a hurried impatience and an anxious worrying about the outcome and the rhythm of the growth of the seed.

From time to time the educator is called to be diligent in sowing the seed abundantly and wisely and then in fulfilling his duty without forcing the rhythm of growth. His greatest aspiration will be that of creating educational journeys which can bring about the young person's discovering the heart of God, so that fulfilling the will of God, he may succeed in perceiving the immense joy of the gift that is life and of the life that makes itself a gift.

Sustained by the certitude that the heavenly Father continues to call very many young people to follow more closely in the footsteps of Christ his Son in the sacred ministry, in the profession of the evangelical counsels and in missionary life, I entrust to all the responsible authorities and to those engaged in the pastoral care of youth and of vocations the task, at the same time fascinating and demanding, of stirring up vocations. This must be done in such a way that there be "a more widespread and deeply felt conviction that all members of the Church, without exception, have the grace and responsibility to look after vocations" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 41).

5. I am certain that in this World Day of Prayer for Vocations the first place will be given to prayer. Let the whole Church pray with trusting hope, aware that vocations are a gift to be begged for with prayer and to be merited with holiness of life.

To Mary, who in her youth lived out the extraordinary call to be all for God and all for man in the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word, I entrust all the young people of the world and all those who, journeying with them, make themselves their guides on the path to perfection.

May "the Mother of the Redeemer" make intercession so that in the Church life might beget new life and all members of the Body of Christ may know how to show the world that there is no true humanity unless there is commitment to live as God wills.

Let us pray

O Virgin of Nazareth,
the "yes" spoken in youth marked your
existence and it grew as did your life itself.

O Mother of Jesus,
in your free and joyful "yes"

and in your active faith so many generations
and so many educators have found inspiration
and strength for welcoming the Word of God
and for fulfilling his will.

O Teacher of life,
teach young people to pronounce the "yes"
that gives meaning to existence
and brings them to discover the hidden "name" of God
in the heart of every person.

O Queen of the Apostles, give us wise educators,
who will know how to love young people and help them grow,
guiding them to the encounter with Truth which makes one free and happy.
Amen!

With these wishes, from my heart I impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, Venerable Brothers in the
Episcopate, you priests, deacons, religious men and women and to all the lay faithful, in particular
to the young men and young women, who with a docile heart, listen to the voice of God and are
ready to welcome it with a generous and faithful adherence.

From Vatican City, 18 October 1994, the seventeenth year of my Pontificate.