



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR THE XXXV WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

3 MAY 1998 - IV SUNDAY OF EASTER

Topic: **"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'"** (Ap 22,17). *Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dearest Brothers and Sisters throughout the world!* The journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, places the World Day of Prayer for Vocations this year under the "luminous cloud" of the Holy Spirit, who acts perennially in the Church, enriching her with those ministries and charisms she needs to fulfil her mission. 1. *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness..."* (Mt 4,1). The whole of Jesus' life unfolded under the influence of the Holy Spirit; at the beginning it was He who overshadowed the Virgin Mary in the inexpressible mystery of the Incarnation; in the river Jordan it was also He who gave witness to the beloved Son of the Father and led Him into the desert. In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus himself testified that: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk 4,18). This same Spirit He promised to His disciples as an everlasting guarantee of his presence among them. On the cross he gave the Spirit back to the Father (cf. Jn 19,30), in this way sealing the New Covenant at the dawn of Easter. On the day of Pentecost, finally, He poured out the Spirit on the early community to consolidate it in the faith and set it out on the paths of the world. Since then the Church, the mystical body of Christ, travels along the pathways of time supported by the wind of the same Spirit, lighting up history with the burning fire of the Word of God, purifying the hearts and the lives of men with the rivers of living water which flow from his breast (cf. Jn 7,37-39). In this way is accomplished the Church's vocation to be "a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (St Cyprian, De Dominica Oratione, 23: CCL 3/A, 105), and "the trustee of the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who consecrates for mission those whom the Father calls through his Son Jesus Christ" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, 35). 2. *"You are a letter from Christ...written with the Spirit of the living God...on tablets of human hearts"* (2 Cor 3,3). In the Church, with baptism, every Christian begins to live under "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8,2) and, under the guidance of the Spirit, he enters into dialogue with God and the brothers and sisters and knows the extraordinary greatness of his own vocation. The celebration of this Day is an auspicious occasion for announcing that the Holy Spirit of God writes in the heart and life of every baptised person a project of love and grace, which is the only way to give full meaning to existence, opening the way to the freedom of the children of God and enabling the offering of one's personal and irreplaceable contribution to the progress of humanity on the path of justice and truth. The Spirit does not only help to place oneself sincerely before the great questions of the heart - Where do I come from? Where am I going? Who am I? What is the purpose of life? How should I spend my time? - but opens up the prospect of courageous responses. The discovery that each man and woman has his own place in God's heart and in the history of humanity constitutes the point of departure for a new culture of vocations. 3. *"The Spirit and the Bride say,*

Come" (Ap. 22,17). These words of the Apocalypse lead us to consider the fertile relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church from which the different vocations have emerged, and to remember that "Pentecost" in which every Christian community is generated in unity, moulded by the fire of the Spirit in the multiplicity of gifts and sent to bear the Good News to every heart that awaits it. If it is true in fact that the call always has its source in God, it is also true that the vocational dialogue takes place in the Church and through the Church. The energy of the Spirit has not been exhausted; that which urged Peter to go to the house of the centurion Cornelius to bring salvation to him (Acts 10,19) and which said: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13,2). The Gospel continues to spread "not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thes 1,5). The Holy Spirit and the Church, his mystical Bride, speak again to the men and women of our time, "Come!". Come to meet the incarnate Word, who wishes to make you participants in his own life! Come to welcome the call of God, overcoming hesitation and obstacles! Come and discover the history of love which God has woven with humanity: He wishes to realise this with you also. Come and savour the joy of forgiveness welcomed and given. The wall of separation which existed between God and man and among human beings has been broken down. Faults have been forgiven, the banquet of life has been set for all. Blessed are they who, attracted by the power of the Word and moulded by the Sacraments, speak their "Here I am!". They are setting out on the path of total and radical belonging to God, strengthened by the hope which does not disappoint, "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5,5). 4.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12,4). In the new life, which is born of Baptism and is developed by means of the Word and the Sacraments, charisms, ministries and the different forms of consecrated life find nourishment. It is possible to generate new vocations in the Spirit when the Christian community lives in an attitude of total fidelity to its Lord. That presupposes an intensive climate of faith and prayer, a generous witness of communion and esteem in the face of the many gifts of the Spirit, a missionary passion which, conquering easy and illusory selfishness, encourages the total gift of self for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Each particular Church is called to commit itself to supporting the development of the gifts and charisms which the Lord rouses in the hearts of the faithful. Our attention, on this Day, is however directed in a particular way to vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, because of the fundamental role which these have in the life of the Church and the fulfilment of her mission. Offering himself to the Father on the cross, Jesus has made his disciples "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19,6) and "a spiritual house...a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 Pet 2,5). To the service of this universal priesthood of the New Covenant, he called the Twelve, "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons" (Mk 3,14-15). Today Christ continues his saving action through the Bishops and priests who "in the Church and on behalf of the Church...are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd, authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation" (*Pastores dabo vobis*, 15). "How can we not recall with gratitude to the Spirit the many different forms of consecrated life which He has raised up throughout history and which still exist in the Church today? They can be compared to a plant with many branches, which sinks its roots into the Gospel and brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 5). The consecrated life is placed in the very heart of the Church as an element decisive to her mission, since it expresses the intimate nature of the Christian vocation and the tension of the whole Church-Bride towards union with the one Spouse. While they are necessary in every age, these vocations are even more necessary today, in a world marked by great contradictions and the temptation to relegate God to the margins in the fundamental choices of life. The words of the Gospel come to mind: "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!" (Mt 9,37-38, cf. Lk 10,2). The Church welcomes every day this command of the Lord and, with faithful hope, raises up her invocations to the "Lord of the

harvest", recognising that only He can call and send his labourers. My wish is that the annual celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations raise up in the hearts of the faithful a more intense prayer to obtain new vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life and reawaken the responsibility of all, especially parents and those who educate in the faith, to promote vocations.⁵ *Account for the hope that is in you* (cf. 1 Pet 3,15). Firstly I invite you, dearest Bishops, and with you, the priests, deacons and members of Institutes of consecrated life, to give witness unceasingly to the spiritual and human ardour which urged each one of you to make yourselves "all things to all men", so that the love of Christ might reach the greatest possible number of people. Establish appropriate relationships with all parts of society; evaluate the ministerial and charismatic vocations which the Spirit raises up in your communities, promoting their complementarity and collaboration; give your contribution so that each may grow towards full Christian maturity. Looking at you, joyful servants of the Gospel, young men and women might perceive the attraction of a life totally dedicated to Christ in the ordained ministry or in the radical choice of the consecrated life. You, Christian husbands and wives, be ready to account for the profound reality of your matrimonial vocation: harmony in the home, a spirit of faith and prayer, the exercise of the Christian virtues, openness to others, especially the poor, participation in the life of the Church, a quiet strength in facing up to daily difficulties, all of these constitute a favourable setting for the vocational maturing of children. Understood as the "domestic Church", the family, sustained by the sacramental grace of matrimony, is the permanent school of the civilisation of love, where it is possible to learn that only from the free and sincere gift of self does the fullness of life flow. And you, teachers, catechists, pastoral workers, and all others entrusted with educational roles, be aware that you are co-operating with the Spirit in your important and difficult service. Help young people to free their hearts and minds from whatever is blocking the path; urge them to give the best of themselves in a constant tension of human and Christian growth; with the light and the strength of the Gospel Word, build up in them the most profound sentiments, so that, if called, they may realise their vocation for the good of the Church and the world. Given that the journey of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 this year centres on the Holy Spirit, we are invited to pay particular attention to the sacrament of Confirmation. Because of this, I now wish to say a few words specifically to those who at this time are receiving this sacrament. My dearest young people, during the rite the Bishop will turn to you and say: "The gift of the Holy Spirit which you are to receive will be a spiritual sign and seal to make you more like Christ and more perfect members of his Church". And so there begins for you a privileged time, during which you are invited to question yourselves and question the Christian community of which you have been made living members, on the full meaning to be given to your existence. It is a time of discernment and vocational choice. Listen to the invitation of Jesus: "*Come and see*". Give your witness to Christ in the ecclesial community, according to the totally personal and unrepeatable plan which God has for you. Let the Holy Spirit, who has been poured into your hearts, guide you to the truth and make you witnesses to authentic freedom and love. Do not let yourselves be overwhelmed by easy and fallacious myths of fleeting human success and riches. On the contrary, do not be afraid to follow the demanding and courageous paths of charity and generous commitment. Learn to "account for the hope that is in you" before all men and women (1 Pet 3,15)!⁶ "*The Spirit helps us in our weakness*" (Rom 8,26). The World Day of Prayer for Vocations is identified primarily by prayer for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, a culminating expression of a habitual climate of prayer, from which the Christian community cannot dispense itself. This year, too, we wish to turn with trust to the Holy Spirit, that he may obtain for the Church of today the gift of many, holy vocations: *Spirit of eternal Love, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, we thank You for all the vocations of apostles and saints which have enriched the Church. Continue, we pray, this work of Yours.*

*Remember when, at Pentecost,
You descended on the Apostles gathered together in prayer
with Mary, the mother of Jesus,
and look upon your Church which today has
particular need of holy priests,
of faithful and authoritative witnesses of your grace;
she needs consecrated men and women,
who show the joy of those who live only for the Father,
who make their own the mission and the offering of Christ,
who build up in charity the new world.
Holy Spirit, eternal Spring of joy and peace,
it is You who open the heart and the mind to the divine call;
it is You who make effective every impetus
towards good, towards truth, towards charity.
Your "inexpressible groans"
rise up to the Father from the heart of the Church,
which suffers and struggles for the Gospel.
Open the hearts and minds of young men and women,
so that a new flowering of holy vocations
may show forth the fidelity of your love,
and all may know Christ,
the true light come into the world
to offer to every human being
the sure hope of eternal life. Amen. To all I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Blessing. From Castel Gandolfo, 24
September 1997. JOHN PAUL II*