



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE EUROPEAN CONGRESS
ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF VOCATIONS***

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 4 July 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I meet you with great pleasure, aware of the precious pastoral service that you carry out in the context of the promotion, animation and discernment of vocations. You have come to Rome to take part in a congress of reflection, comparison and sharing among the Churches of Europe on the theme: *"Sowers of the Gospel of Vocation: a word that calls and sends forth"* and it aims to imbue your commitment to vocations with new dynamism. The fostering of vocations is a pastoral priority for every diocese which assumes even greater value in the context of the Year for Priests that has just begun. I therefore warmly greet the Bishops Delegate for the pastoral care of vocations of the various Bishops' Conferences, as well as the directors of the national Vocations Centres, their collaborators and all of you present.

At the heart of your labours is the Gospel Parable of the Sower. The Lord scatters the seed of the word of God freely and with abundance but knowing that it may fall on poor soil, which will not allow a seed to mature because of dryness, or that its vital force may be extinguished, choked by thorn bushes. Yet the sower does not lose heart, for he knows that part of this seed is destined to find "good soil", namely, ardent hearts capable of receiving the word with willingness to help it mature through perseverance and yield fruit generously for the benefit of many.

The image of the soil can evoke the reality of the family, on the whole good; the sometimes arid and harsh environment of work; the days of suffering and tears. The earth is above all the heart of every person, especially of youth, to whom you address your service of listening and guidance: a heart that is often confused and disoriented, yet capable of containing unimaginable powers of generosity. It is like a bud ready to open to a life spent for the love of Jesus, able to follow him with

the totality and the certainty that comes from having found the greatest treasure that exists. It is always and only the Lord who sows in human hearts. Only after the abundant and generous sowing of the word of God can one progress further along the paths of companionship and education, of formation and discernment. All this is linked to that tiny seed, the mysterious gift of divine Providence which releases from within an extraordinary force. In fact, it is the Word of God who brings about in himself what he says and desires.

There is another saying of Jesus' which uses the image of the seed, and which can accompany the Parable of the Sower: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12: 24). Here the Lord insists on the connection between the death of the seed and the "much fruit" that it will yield. The grain of wheat is he, Jesus. The fruit is having "life abundantly" (Jn 10: 10), which he acquired for us through his Cross. This is also the logic and the true fruitfulness of every vocations ministry in the Church. Like Christ, the priest and the animator must be a "grain of wheat" who sacrifices itself to do the Father's will; who lives hidden from the clamour and the noise; who renounces the search for that visibility and grandiose image which today often become the criteria and even goals of life in a large part of our culture and which attract many young people.

Dear friends, be sowers of trust and hope. The sense of being lost that the youth of today often experience is indeed profound. Human words are frequently without a future or prospects, and also lack meaning and wisdom. The attitude of frenetic impatience and of the inability to live through a period of waiting is spreading. Yet, this could be God's hour: his call, mediated by the power and efficacy of the word, generates a path of hope towards the fullness of life. The word of God can truly become light and strength, a spring of hope, it can plot a path that passes through Jesus, the "path" and the "way"; through his Cross, which is the fullness of love. This is the message that comes to us from the Pauline Year which has just ended. St Paul, won over by Christ, inspired and formed vocations, as can be seen clearly from the greetings of his Letters, in which dozens of proper names appear, that is, the faces of men and women who worked with him in service of the Gospel. This is also the message of the [Year for Priests](#) that has just begun: the Holy Curé d'Ars, John Mary Vianney who is the "beacon" of this new spiritual itinerary was a priest who devoted his life to the spiritual guidance of people, with humility and simplicity, "tasting and seeing" God's goodness in ordinary situations. He thus proved to be a true teacher in the ministry of consolation and vocational guidance. The [Year for Priests](#) therefore offers a beautiful opportunity to rediscover the profound sense of the vocations ministry, as well as the fundamental decisions on its method: simple and credible witness, communion, with itineraries organized and shared within the local Church, the daily routine which is a lesson in following the Lord in everyday life; listening, guided by the Holy Spirit, to orient youth in their search for God and for true happiness; and lastly truth, which alone can give rise to inner freedom.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the word of God become in each one of you a source of blessing, of consolation and of renewed trust, so that you may help many to "see" and "touch" that Jesus

whom they welcomed as Teacher. May the Word of the Lord always dwell within you, renew in your hearts the light, love and peace that God alone can give, and make you capable of witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel, source of communion and love. With this hope, which I entrust to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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