

THE POPE

'Vocations Are Grave Responsibility'

Following is the text, provided by NC News, of the message issued by Pope John Paul II for the 20th annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

"I have set you to be light for the gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts 13:47)



"My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me." (Jn. 10:27)

Thus we read in the liturgical readings of the fourth Sunday after Easter, on which we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. This is the word of God, which is proclaimed to us that we may raise our minds to great thoughts in the light of our Easter faith.

The word of God reveals to us a mystery which has been manifested in the life of humanity. A decisive event has taken place: the Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, has offered himself for the salvation of the world. From that moment a new history has begun, and the Church of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to bring this proclamation of salvation to all peoples, to the uttermost parts of the earth. It is a demanding mission, entrusted to the humble persons of the apostles, their successors and fellow-workers, taken from every nation, century after century, with the promise that no earthly power will ever be able to interrupt it.

The mystery of this invisible continuity is illumined by the presence of the Lord Jesus, who, though living in his immortal glory, is ever near us: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt. 28:20) He is with us, he knows us, not just in order to offer his salvation to each one of us, but also in order to save others through us.

Among his many calls we can distinguish those calls to a more immediate collaboration in his own mission; the ordained ministries, the consecrated life, the missionary life. These are a privilege which, in reality, corresponds to a limitless measure of love and sacrifice in the total dedication of self to God and the Church. How can we worthily thank the Lord for the great trust that he put in us?

For me it has always been a source of joy to celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and I wish to unite myself in a special way with this year's celebration, which is the 20th. In fact, 20 years have gone by since the dear and venerated Pope Paul VI had the inspiration to call the whole Church by means of a special "day," to meditate and pray for vocations specially consecrated to the cause of the gospel. Many happy things, and less happy ones, have happened in these 20 years.

There has been the successful conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, which devoted so much attention to a detailed study of the priestly, religious and missionary vocation and mission, in the living light of the word of God and of Christian tradition. The council has left us the legacy of a wealth of teaching, which all believers have the right and duty to know exactly, also for the purpose of making clearer choices for their personal lives.

During the course of these years some churches have suffered, not only because of external persecutions, but also from internal difficulties, whereby considerable sufferings have been caused to the Church precisely by those who ought to have offered her the most comfort.

But the Lord has also given us the consolation of seeing in many parts of the Church the beginnings of a new situation, for there is an ever-increasing number of those following his call. For this comforting reawakening and renewed generosity we thank the Lord who has heard the prayers of his Church.

The last 20 years have been a period full of spiritual and pastoral experience with regard to ecclesial vocations. My predecessor, Paul VI, and I myself, in every circumstance and especially in these annual messages, have wished to emphasize various important points, and I would like to summarize them here, even though they are already clear in your minds:

- The word of God and vocations, Vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life exist in the Church and for the Church in accordance with God's plan, which in his love he has willed to reveal to us. Therefore they exist for a specific mission of their own, which is not to be confused with any other purely human ideal, however noble. May the Lord Jesus grant us the grace to know, to believe, to accept, through his word, these calls, which belong to the mystery of his merciful love.

- Prayer and vocations. The Church is a gift of God for the salvation of humanity. Therefore vocations to the total service of the Church are also a special gift of God. For this reason we ask this gift from him alone, for he alone can give it. We ask for it with our hearts open to the world, looking to the good of all humanity. Remember that the Lord Jesus has invited us to pray for vocations, precisely because his merciful heart saw the world's suffering: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into the harvest.'" (Mt 9:36-38)

- Witness and vocations. You are familiar with these words of the Council: "The duty of fostering Vocations" to the priesthood - and this holds for every consecrated vocation - "falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives." ("Optatum Totius, 2") The Lord Jesus had spoken of the "good soil" which "brought forth grain, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mt 13:8) Where there is faith, prayer, love, apostolate, Christian living, there the gifts of God abound. Brothers and sons and daughters, let us reflect upon our grave responsibility.

- A personal call and vocations. God calls whom he wishes out of the free initiative of his love. But he also wishes to call through us. This is how the Lord Jesus acted. It was Andrew who brought to him his brother Peter. Jesus called Philip, but it was Philip who called Nathanael. (cf. Jn 1:35 ff) One should not fear to suggest directly to young or not so young persons the call of the Lord. It is an act of esteem and trust. It can be a moment of light and grace.

And so I invite you to join me in my prayer:

Lord Jesus, in this holy year in which we relive the event and the mystery of your redeeming sacrifice for the salvation of humanity, hear our plea:

- through your Spirit, renew your Church, the she may be enabled to offer the world in ever greater measure the fruits of your redemption;

- through your Spirit, strengthen in their holy resolves those who have dedicated their lives to your Church: in the priesthood, the diaconate, the religious life, the missionary institutes, the other forms of consecrated life; you who have called them to your service, make them perfect co-workers in your work of salvation;

- through your Spirit, increase the calls to your service: you read human hearts, and you know that many are ready to follow you and work for you; give to many young and not so young people the generosity needed for accepting your call, give them the strength needed for accepting the sacrifices that this entails, give them the joy of carrying the cross that goes with their choice, as you were the first to carry it, in the certainty of the resurrection.

We pray to you, Lord Jesus, together with your holy mother Mary, who was near you in the hour of your redeeming sacrifice, we pray to you through her intercession, that many among us, also today, may have the courage and the humility, the fidelity and the love to answer "Yes," just as she answered when she was called to collaborate with you in your mission of universal salvation. Amen.

I entrust this prayer to the mercy of God, that he may accept it and grant it. Our confidence in this matter grows greater by reason of the holy year, which we are celebrating as the memorial of the redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus. From him I implore the abundance of grace, and I am happy to impart my apostolic blessing to all of you, venerable brothers in the episcopate, to the priests, to men and women religious and to all the people of God, and in a special way to those who are being trained in seminaries and religious institutes.

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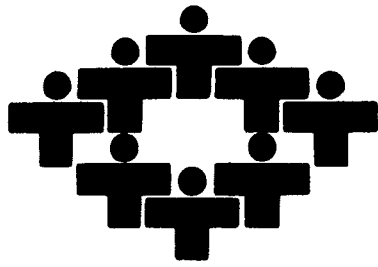
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A Message For Your Family



ABOUT VOCATIONS

By Terrance J. Brennan

Sunday, April 24, is the diocesan observance of World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

To mark the day, the offices of Vocations and Family Life have assembled a brochure that will be distributed in each parish that day.

The brochure will be a supplement to the parish bulletins available to

Father Thomas Valenti, left, vocations director, and Sue and Frank Staropoli, directors of the family life office, discuss the upcoming World Day of Prayer for Vocations this Sunday. The Family Life office logo and the headline, above, are featured on the cover of the brochure to be handed out that day.

parishioners after each Mass. According to Father Thomas Valenti, director of the vocations office, some 117,000 of these pamphlets

have been distributed here.

"The brochure is directed to the parents," Father Valenti said. "We feel that a proper understanding of vocation awareness begins in the home. Therefore, we want to give parents suggestions as to how they can foster this awareness in their children."

"In families, we should be giving the message of choice of vocations: 'What way is God calling me?' rather than

years at the parish. Msgr. Duffy was ordained in 1945 and served assistant pastorships throughout the diocese until he was appointed diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1961.

He served in that capacity until 1969, when he was named pastor of St. Mary's in Dansville. In June 1972 he became pastor of St. Catherine's in Addison and in June of 1976 pastor of St. Francis in Phelps.

"Is God calling me?" said Frank and Sue Staropoli, directors of the Office of Family Life.

According to the team, there are very often misconceptions by youths that a call to a vocation has to be a call to the priesthood or religious life, or that a priest has to be more committed to God than they themselves.

"So often, people don't think that marriage, or especially the single life, is an important vocation," said the Staropolis, "but it must be realized that this call is no greater or lesser a call than one to the priesthood. We should be just as committed to God and His work."

The brochure includes a brief statement from Bishop Clark, a prayer for vocation awareness, and numerous suggestions for parents on how they can foster this awareness in their children.

The brochure is part of a continuing effort and dialogue between the two offices to work as one.

Urban Changes

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Father Calimeri, Father Endres and Father Costanza for the service they have given to you."

The bishop wrote parishioners at St. Francis in Phelps about Msgr. Duffy's desire to undertake a sabbatical and said, "I have decided to link his sabbatical with a new pastoral assignment."

The Precious Blood Fathers assumed the pastorate of St.

Anthony's in June of 1974. The move was taken to relieve a shortage of diocesan priests committed to pastoral work. The restoration of the parish to diocesan supervision is apparently to give Father Mulligan an urban base for his new ministry.

Father Calimeri has been pastor at St. Jerome's since March of 1965. He also had served as assistant in the parish for a six-year stint in the 1950s, giving him some 25