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TENTH WORLD DAY of PRAYER for VOCATIONS

Message

Pope Paul VI

May 13, 1973

For the tenth time we are celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Once more it is our joy and duty to salute you, dear sons and daughters, on this blessed day which, falling midway in the Easter season, is bathed in the light of the risen Christ and looks forward to Pentecost. We address our remarks to you, dear brothers in the episcopacy, priests and deacons, religious men and women, members of secular institutes, missionaries throughout the world, parents and educators—and above all to you, beloved young people, who are now considering your future.

Perhaps these words of ours draw you together in the liturgical celebration, at the most intimate and profound moment of shared participation in the Eucharist, where Christ is present among you in his sacrifice and in the proclamation of his word. (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7) We take our inspiration from the gospel, where Christ speaks to you even while we do. Although you are following our Roman Rite, our beloved sons who follow other rites will certainly find equal inspiration in meditating on the words of the Lord according to the hallowed tradition of their own Churches.

What rich teachings we find in the memorable pages of the gospel! They present to us the figure of the Good Shepherd, the true shepherd, the one shepherd. They depict our Lord Jesus who offers his life—offers it freely—for his sheep, whom he knows and by whom he is known; our Lord who thinks as well of those who are not yet members of his fold—that fold

Vocation (in religious orders, congregations, etc.)

which he must lead, which will hear his voice, which will become one flock with one shepherd. (cf. John 10, 11-18)

From such great riches we wish to single out only one point as the theme for the tenth World Day of Prayer for Vocations. It is this: "I lay down my life . . . I lay it down freely." (*loc. cit.* 17s) It is striking how the gospel returns to and insists upon this thought: full generosity, in perfect liberty, in the giving of oneself. We have here a great lesson and example, dear sons and daughters.

As you know, the concept of "vocation," in the fullest sense in which we Christians understand the word, is a great mystery of faith. It is God our Father, creator and lord of heaven and earth, who calls everything into existence, calls every living creature to life, calls every spiritual being to know him and love him. It is God, too, who calls men to collaborate with him in ruling and completing creation. "You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hand." (Ps. 8, 5s; cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 12 & 67) It is Jesus our savior who calls everything into his kingdom: "Come to me, all you. . . ." (Matthew 11, 28); and who calls each person to participate more directly in his mission of salvation: "Come after me; I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1, 17) It is the Spirit of the Father and of Jesus who continues to make his most personal call resound deep in our our hearts. "One and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills." (1 Cor. 12, 11) He distributes among the faithful of all orders special graces, by which he prepares them to assume a variety of tasks and offices for the renewal and further growth of the Church. For "to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Cor. 12, 7: *Lumen Gentium* 12)

The Lord has entrusted everything to you. He has placed everything in your hands: the things of this world and those which pertain to the growth of his Church and the announcement of his gospel of universal salvation. One essential thing remains: that your generosity in cooperating with God correspond to his generosity in extending the offer. Christ is the first model. "I lay down my life. . . ." (*loc. cit.*)

This invitation to generosity concerns all of you. It involves the kind of choice you have made or wish to make. For from the mystery of your baptism itself there arises the unceasing call to a full Christian life, in faith and action. "You must be

made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5, 48)

This is also an invitation to generosity which concerns in a special way those of you who have chosen a consecrated life in the service of the Church, in response to a special calling. It is this call you follow that urges you on, so that each day your response may be better than the day before. "My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit." (John 15, 8) You must do much because much has been given to you. If we say this, it is because we know that young people look to you.

This is, finally, an invitation to generosity which we commend with special affection to you young people who have not yet made your final choice. Many of you are called. The paths open to you for the service of the Church, the people of God, are numerous. I need not tell you about this. You know it is so. Will you be called without responding? Won't you set foot on these paths? What is there to be afraid of? You are generous. Be generous in this, too.

Nothing can resist God when he calls. "For who can oppose his will?" (Romans 9, 19) And yet it is not that simple. When it comes to the liberty of his children, whom he has created free, God stands firm. His call, each call, retains the force and attractiveness of an invitation, in which none of his divine power is lost and none of our liberty is removed. You are free. Therefore, decide—as, first of all, Christ has done. "I lay down my life . . . freely." (*loc. cit.*)

Dear sons and daughters, those who are young or perhaps not so young, we say this to you: Don't let people or ideas or events block your choices and your decisions. Why do you hang back and wait? The face of the world is rapidly being changed. A new generation is arising in this earth. The gospel must be announced to everyone. Yesterday's poor are joined by tomorrow's. There are and will be people who are hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, sick in body and spirit. They look to you; in them you see Christ. (cf. Matthew 25, 35sq.) There is work for everyone. There is a place for you.

May the Lord bless you on this day of meditation and prayer. May he bless you in your generosity and your freedom. May he make your generosity more generous and your liberty more free from every obstacle which might hinder it.

As a pledge I give you, with full affection, our apostolic blessing.

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