



**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE POPE'S MESSAGE
FOR THE 48th WORLD DAY
OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS**

Theme: "Proposing Vocations in the Local Church"

The work of carefully encouraging and supporting vocations finds a radiant source of inspiration in those places in the Gospel where Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and trains them with love and care. We should pay close attention to the way that Jesus called his closest associates to proclaim the Kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 10:9). **In the first place, it is clear that the first thing he did was to pray for them: before calling them, Jesus spent the night alone in prayer, listening to the will of the Father (cf. *Lk* 6:12) in a spirit of interior detachment from mundane concerns.** It is Jesus' intimate conversation with the Father which results in the calling of his disciples. Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the "Lord of the harvest", whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.

It is a challenging and uplifting invitation that Jesus addresses to those to whom he says: "Follow me!" He invites them to become his friends, to listen attentively to his word and to live with him. He teaches them complete commitment to God and to the extension of his kingdom in accordance with the law of the Gospel: "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). He invites them to leave behind their own narrow agenda and their notions of self-fulfilment in order to immerse themselves in another will, the will of God, and to be guided by it. He gives them an experience of fraternity, one born of that total openness to God (cf. *Mt* 12:49-50) which becomes the hallmark of the community of Jesus: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn* 13:35).

It is no less challenging to follow Christ today. It means learning to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, growing close to him, listening to his word and encountering him in the sacraments; it means learning to conform our will to his.

Particularly in these times, when the voice of the Lord seems to be drowned out by "other voices" and his invitation to follow him by the gift of one's own life may seem too difficult, every Christian community, every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations. It is important to encourage and support those who show clear signs of a call to priestly life and religious consecration, and to enable them to feel the warmth of the whole community as they respond "yes" to God and the Church. I encourage them, in the same words which I addressed to those who have already chosen to enter the seminary: "You have done a good thing. Because people will always have need of God, even in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization: they will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God who gathers us together in the universal Church in order to learn with him and through him life's true meaning and in order to uphold and apply the standards of true humanity" (*Letter to Seminarians*, 18 October 2010).

It is essential that every local Church become more sensitive and attentive to the pastoral care of vocations, helping children and young people in particular at every level of family, parish and associations – as Jesus did with his disciples - to grow into a genuine and affectionate friendship with the Lord, cultivated through personal and liturgical prayer; to grow in familiarity with the sacred Scriptures and thus to listen attentively and fruitfully to the word of God; to understand that entering into God's will does not crush or destroy a person, but

instead leads to the discovery of the deepest truth about ourselves; and finally to be generous and fraternal in relationships with others, since it is only in being open to the love of God that we discover true joy and the fulfilment of our aspirations. “Proposing Vocations in the Local Church” means having the courage, through an attentive and suitable concern for vocations, to point out this challenging way of following Christ which, because it is so rich in meaning, is capable of engaging the whole of one’s life.

The Second Vatican Council explicitly reminded us that “the duty of fostering vocations pertains to the whole Christian community, which should exercise it above all by a fully Christian life” (*Optatam Totius*, 2). I wish, then, to say a special word of acknowledgment and encouragement to those who work closely in various ways with the priests in their parishes. In particular, I turn to those who can offer a specific contribution to the pastoral care of vocations: to priests, families, catechists and leaders of parish groups. I ask priests to testify to their communion with their bishop and their fellow priests, and thus to provide a rich soil for the seeds of a priestly vocation. May families be “animated by the spirit of faith and love and by the sense of duty” (*Optatam Totius*, 2) which is capable of helping children to welcome generously the call to priesthood and to religious life. May catechists and leaders of Catholic groups and ecclesial movements, convinced of their educational mission, seek to “guide the young people entrusted to them so that these will recognize and freely accept a divine vocation” (*ibid.*).

Dear brothers and sisters, your commitment to the promotion and care of vocations becomes most significant and pastorally effective when carried out in the unity of the Church and in the service of communion. For this reason, every moment in the life of the Church community – catechesis, formation meetings, liturgical prayer, pilgrimages – can be a precious opportunity for awakening in the People of God, and in particular in children and young people, a sense of belonging to the Church and of responsibility for answering the call to priesthood and to religious life by a free and informed decision.

The ability to foster vocations is a hallmark of the vitality of a local Church.