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"Vocation, like holiness, is not reserved for a few"

Message of Pope Francis for the 2022 World Day of Prayer for Vocations on Sunday 8 May.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the time when the cold winds of war and oppression are blowing and when we frequently encounter signs of polarization, we as a Church have undertaken a synodal process: we sense the urgent need to journey

together, cultivating the spirit of listening, participation and sharing. Together with all men and women of good will, we want to help *build the human family*, heal its wounds and guide it to a better future. On this 59th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I would like to reflect with you on the broader meaning of “vocation” within the context of a synodal Church, a Church that listens to God and to the world.

Called to be protagonists together of the Church's mission

Synodality, journeying together, is a vocation fundamental to the Church. Only against this horizon is it possible to discern and esteem the various vocations, charisms and ministries. We know that the Church exists to evangelize, to go forth and to sow the seed of the Gospel in history. This mission can only be carried out if all areas of pastoral

activity work together and, even more importantly, involve all the Lord's disciples. For "in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. *Mt* 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). We must beware of the mentality that would separate priests and laity, considering the former as protagonists and the latter as executors, and together carry forward the Christian mission as the one People of God, laity and pastors. The Church as a whole is an evangelizing community.

Called to be guardians of one another and of creation

The word "vocation" should not be understood restrictively, as referring simply to those who follow the Lord

through a life of special consecration. All of us are called to share in Christ's mission to reunite a fragmented humanity and to reconcile it with God. Each man and woman, even before encountering Christ and embracing the Christian faith, receives with the gift of life a fundamental calling: each of us is a creature willed and loved by God; each of us has a unique and special place in the mind of God. At every moment of our lives, we are called to foster this divine spark, present in the heart of every man and woman, and thus contribute to the growth of a humanity inspired by love and mutual acceptance. We are called to be guardians of one another, to strengthen the bonds of harmony and sharing, and to heal the wounds of creation lest its beauty be destroyed. In a word, we are called to become a single family in the marvellous common home of creation, in the reconciled diversity

of its elements. In this broad sense, not only individuals have a “vocation”, but peoples, communities and groups of various kinds as well.

Called to welcome God's gaze

Within this great common vocation, God addresses a particular call to each of us. He touches our lives by his love and directs them to our ultimate goal, to a fulfilment that transcends the very threshold of death. That is how God wanted to see our lives and how he sees them still.

Michelangelo Buonarroti is said to have maintained that every block of stone contains a statue within it, and it is up to the sculptor to uncover it. If that is true of an artist, how much more is it true of God! In the young woman of Nazareth he saw the Mother of God. In Simon the fisherman he saw Peter, the rock on which he would build his Church. In the publican Levi he recognized the

apostle and evangelist Matthew, and in Saul, a harsh persecutor of Christians, he saw Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. God's loving gaze always meets us, touches us, sets us free and transforms us, making us into new persons.

That is what happens in every vocation: we are met by the gaze of God, who calls us. Vocation, like holiness, is not an extraordinary experience reserved for a few. Just as there is a "holiness of the saints next door" (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 6-9), so too there is a vocation for everyone, for God's gaze and call is directed to every person.

According to a proverb from the Far East, "a wise person, looking at the egg can see an eagle; looking at the seed he glimpses a great tree; looking at the sinner he glimpses a saint". That is how God looks at us: in each of us, he sees a certain potential, at

times unbeknownst to ourselves, and throughout our lives he works tirelessly so that we can place this potential at the service of the common good.

Vocation arises in this way, thanks to the art of the divine Sculptor who uses his “hands” to make us go forth from ourselves and become the masterpiece that we are called to be. The word of God, which frees us from self-absorption, is especially able to purify, enlighten and recreate us. So let us listen to that word, in order to become ever more open to the vocation that God entrusts to us! And let us learn to listen also to our brothers and sisters in the faith, for their advice and example may help disclose the plan of God, who shows us ever new paths to pursue.

Called to respond to God's gaze

God's loving and creative gaze met us in an entirely unique way in Jesus.

The evangelist Mark tells us that, in speaking with the rich young man, “Jesus looking upon him, loved him” (10:21). This gaze of Jesus, full of love, rests upon each of us. Brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be moved by this gaze to allow him to lead us outside of ourselves! Let us also learn to look at one another in such a way that all those with whom we live and encounter – whoever they may be – will feel welcomed and discover that there is Someone who looks at them with love and invites them to develop their full potential.

Our lives change when we welcome this gaze. Everything becomes a vocational dialogue between ourselves and the Lord, but also between ourselves and others. A dialogue that, experienced in depth, makes us *become ever more who we are*. In the vocation to the ordained priesthood, to be instruments of Christ’s grace and mercy. In the

vocation to the consecrated life, to be the praise of God and the prophecy of a new humanity. In the vocation to marriage, to be mutual gift and givers and teachers of life. In every ecclesial vocation and ministry that calls us to see others and the world through God's eyes, to serve goodness and to spread love with our works and words.

Here I would like to mention the experience of Dr José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros. While working as a physician in Caracas, Venezuela, he wanted to become a Third Order Franciscan. Later, he thought of becoming a monk and a priest, but his health did not allow it. He came to understand that his calling was the medical profession, in which he spent himself above all in service to the poor. He devoted himself unreservedly to those who had contracted the worldwide epidemic known as the "Spanish flu". He died,

hit by a car, as he was leaving a pharmacy after purchasing medicine for one of his elderly patients. An exemplary witness of what it means to accept the call of the Lord and embrace it fully, he was beatified a year ago.

Called to build a fraternal world

As Christians, we do not only receive a vocation individually; we are also *called together*. We are like the tiles of a mosaic. Each is lovely in itself, but only when they are put together do they form a picture. Each of us shines like a star in the heart of God and in the firmament of the universe. At the same time, though, we are called to form constellations that can guide and light up the path of humanity, beginning with the places in which we live. This is the mystery of the Church: a celebration of differences, a sign and instrument of all that humanity is called to be.

For this reason, the Church must become increasingly synodal: capable of walking together, united in harmonious diversity, where everyone can actively participate and where everyone has something to contribute.

When we speak of “vocation”, then, it is not just about choosing this or that way of life, devoting one’s life to a certain ministry or being attracted by the charism of a religious family, movement or ecclesial community. It is about making God’s dream come true, the great vision of fraternity that Jesus cherished when he prayed to the Father “that they may all be one” (*Jn 17:21*). Each vocation in the Church, and in a broader sense in society, contributes to a common objective: to celebrate among men and women that harmony of manifold gifts that can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit. Priests, consecrated men and

women, lay faithful: let us journey and work together in bearing witness to the truth that one great human family united in love is no utopian vision, but the very purpose for which God created us.

Let us pray, brothers and sisters, that the People of God, amid the dramatic events of history, may increasingly respond to this call. Let us implore the light of the Holy Spirit, so that all of us may find our proper place and give the very best of ourselves in this great divine plan!

*Rome, Saint John Lateran, 8 May
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FRANCIS

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