

Delivered December 7, 2000 by His Holiness John Paul II on the occasion of the Serra Jubilee Pilgrimage

Dear Members of Serra International!

- I. I am happy to live with you this intense spiritual moment on the occasion of your Pilgrimage Jubilee to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

I greet Monsignor Justin Francis Rigali, Archbishop of St. Louis and thank him for the cordial words that he has delivered on your behalf. I extend my greetings to all of you here present from various nations.

You carry in this celebration the spiritual sign that distinguishes you: by this I refer to the perception, particularly alive, of Christian existence as <<vocation>>. “*You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...*” (Jn 15,16): this word delivered by Christ to the Apostles, extends to all of the baptized. We should have a joyous and pleasant awareness. Coming to implore the jubilee grace, you have come precisely to open yourselves with new availability to the *fundamental call received in the baptism*, renewing the radical choice of Christian commitment and of sanctity.

- II. Your baptismal calling leads you towards others: it is essentially a missionary calling, as you have learned from the example of Blessed Junipero Serra, the great Evangelizer of California. Following in his footsteps, you have come to share in the heartfelt concern of Christ himself; “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few!” (Mt 9:37; Lk 10:2). How can we fail to feel the timeliness and urgency of these words! The horizon of the Lord’s “harvest” is indeed limitless, if we consider not only the pastoral needs of the Church herself but also the immense number of people who still await the first proclamation of the Gospel. Amid all the complexity of the present time, now, at the dawn of a new millennium, we need to recognize the search for meaning - a real yet often silent search - which is spreading through society. There is an unexpressed sense of need for Christ rising up from young people, from the world of culture, and from the great ethical and social challenges of our time. In order to respond to this need, the whole Church must become completely ministerial, a community of heralds and witnesses, rich in laborers for the harvest.
- III. It is really God himself, the “Lord of the harvest”, who chooses his labourers; his call is always undeserved and unexpected. And yet, in the mystery of God’s covenant with us, we are called to cooperate with his providence, and to use the powerful tool which he has placed in our hands: prayer! This is what Jesus himself asked us to do: “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!” (Mt 9:38)

Dear Serrans, you are committed in a special way to promoting vocations. Never forget that yours must be above all a commitment to prayer, prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful key to resolving the vocations question. But at the same time prayer for vocations is also a school of life, as I had occasion recently to point out: “By praying

for vocations we learn to look with Gospel wisdom at the world and at each person's need for life and salvation; it is a way of sharing in Christ's love and compassion for all mankind..." (*Message for the XXXVIII World Day of Prayer for Vocations, September 14, 2000, No.6*).

- IV. Along with prayer, the work of fostering vocations also requires a constant effort to bring the need to people's attention through personal witness, so that God's call may encounter a ready hearing and generous response in those to whom it is directed. This is the aim of your efforts to spread an authentic culture of vocations.

The Christian community urgently needs to realize that promoting vocations is more than simply a matter of "programmes". It is something that touches the very mystery of the Church. Vocations in fact are relative to the very meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ, formed and enlivened by the Holy Spirit with all the wealth of his gifts. The Second Vatican Council reminded us of this: "In the building up of Christ's body there is a variety of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes his different gifts for the welfare of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium, 7*). Within the People of God, there is a specific mission awaiting each one. Because the needs of the "harvest" are so great, all the members of God's People must grow in the awareness of "being called". Significant are the gifts and tasks associated with the involvement of Christians in the temporal order. These are above all the responsibility of the laity. But, a relevance all their own belongs to the ministries directed to the guidance and growth in holiness of the ecclesial community, namely the priesthood and the consecrated life. As Serrans you understand this, and members of the laity that you are, you are committed to fostering such vocations.

- V. In this ecclesiastical framework is placed, dear Serrans, your commitment to the vocational pastoral. Devoting yourselves to this, you demonstrate that the problem of vocations does not remain the concern of pastors alone, but relies on the sensibility of all, involving, in particular, families and educators. And this is of vital importance.

Continue to give to this end your contribution, in full agreement with your Bishops. Be persons of communion, placing yourselves with hard working affection close to the priests. Come to meet, with the charity that distinguishes you, the demand of the scarce vocations. The good this does, will flow back to the Church, will be a token of abundant celestial blessings, that I willingly invoke upon everyone of you and on your movement through the maternal intercession of Mary, Immaculate Virgin.

With such feelings, from my heart, I bless you all.