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Press Conference to present the Message of the Holy Father for the 60th World Day of Prayer for Vocations

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office, Saint Pius X Hall, Via dell'Ospedale 1, to present the Holy Father's Message for the sixtieth World Day of Prayer for Vocations, on the theme: "Vocation: grace and mission".

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy; Archbishop Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Moreira, secretary of the Dicastery for the Clergy; Msgr. Simone Renna, under-secretary of the Dicastery for the Clergy; and the Reverend Eamonn McLaughlin, official of the same Dicastery.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik

I address a warm welcome to you all, and I thank you for your presence at this press conference. First of all, I would like to say that at this time I am acting as the spokesperson for the feeling of all my collaborators at the Dicastery for the Clergy: together, in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, instituted by Saint Paul VI in 1964, we thought it would be important to share the Holy Father's Message, which will be published shortly. The institution of this Day was indeed a prophetic initiative of the Pope, while the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was fully underway.

This is an opportunity to recall the joy of the encounter with Jesus, who frees us from the sadness of a life enclosed in the prison of individualism, broadens horizons, and fills the heart (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1-2). The sweet and comforting joy that derives from the encounter with the Lord is what enables each one of us to discover his own vocation: indeed, God has a "dream" He wishes to realize for us and with us, a plan that He delivers to us so that, by welcoming it and realizing it in full freedom, we can find the authentic meaning of our existence, the fulfilment of our humanity, but also the mission through which we can contribute to

building a more fraternal, just and solidarity-based world, a foretaste and realization of the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis, in the Message for the sixtieth World Day of Prayer for Vocations, vigorously emphasizes this “dynamism of the encounter” between God and man, which is at the heart of what we mean by the word “vocation”. And he urges us to rediscover the primacy of God, because only when we make space for Him and His calling, can our life flourish and our freedom be realized in goodness and in truth. The Holy Father makes a precise decision: to start from God, from His grace, from His paternal and caring solicitude with which He moves towards us, to come in search of us and to speak with us “as friends” (Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 2). Only from the free and generous gift of friendship with which the Lord comes to us arises the possibility of carrying out a mission in our life, in the Church, in society and in history. From God’s grace, in short, our mission here on earth is born!

Grace and mission are, then, the two poles and the two constitutive dimensions of every vocation and, therefore, they are the two words on which Pope Francis focuses in the Message. God created us with love and for love, and thus, discovering our own vocation – in personal life, in the Church, in society – the horizon in which to enter to open ourselves to happiness must be that of love: a life given, a life spent, a life that takes a risk on plans of love by defeating the temptation of calculation and selfishness, and letting oneself be driven by “God’s imagination that calls to us”. This initiative of God awaits a response from us and, when we cannot remain indifferent, we do not stifle God’s voice, we do not decline His invitation to “fly high”, then our calling is made concrete in a mission, in a life choice and in a commitment that is realized in everyday things, in the places we frequent, in the words and attitudes we live, in every situation.

It will not have escaped your notice that, like last year, this year’s Message emphasizes the vocation to self-giving, common to all Christians: all are called to be in the front line, to do their part so that the earth may become the common Home where individuals and peoples live together as brothers and sisters, under the gaze of the one Father.

This is undoubtedly the core and the profound meaning also of the current synodal path to which Pope Francis has invited us: to walk together, but outwardly. And in this every baptized person, no one excluded, has his or her active part, to the point of being able to say of themselves:

“I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 273).

From the words Pope Francis has chosen for this Message, then, we can discover the very heart of the good news of the Gospel: each one of us has a place in the heart of God, no one excluded; each one of us has been thought of, created and called with love, from time immemorial; each one of us is loved by the Father and is sent into the world and the Church as a sign of this love.

And this liberating truth is also an invitation to the Church! For it is first and foremost the Church that must bring this good news to the world. It is the Church that, with a joyful face and outstretched arms, must know how to say to every woman and every man: you are loved by God and the Lord has a dream for your life too! Therefore, in the diversity and variety of its charisms, the Christian Community is called to become a welcoming and hospitable place, which never excludes, which does not hinder the imagination of the Spirit, but helps everyone to discover their vocation. It is a task that requires the commitment of lay people and pastors: let us ensure that each person, each with their own sensitivity and their own life path, crossing the threshold of the Christian Community can find there the tools they need to search for their own happiness and to discover God’s plan: silence, prayer, listening, discernment. We need, today more than ever, a Church that accompanies, that takes by the hand, that becomes close to the journey of each person, welcoming their questions and supporting their steps.

And, in this way, as Pope Francis wishes us to do, we will enlarge the spaces of love everywhere.

Intervention of Archbishop Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Moreira

“Vocation: grace and mission” is the title of the Holy Father Francis’ Message for the sixtieth World Day of Prayer for Vocations”; it evokes the two poles that make Christian life a continual dynamism, both in the existence of each person and in the community. Indeed, we are all “*chosen before the creation of the world*”; that is, the plan of salvation that springs from the heart of God is realized by means of the Holy Spirit, who communicates the vivifying grace that enriches every community, family and person, making them true Christians. A Christian not only announces the Good News of the Redemption, but also, on the testimony of his or her own coherence of life, can declare “*I am a mission on this earth*” and at the same time effectively recognize himself or herself as a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, one with the brothers and sisters in the faith, who are aware that they have been “Called together: summoned”. Two poles, then: “*Grace and mission: gift and task*”.

I would like to note two aspects in particular, which underpin the Message:

- Pope Francis’ explicit reference to the personal journey of grace and mission. Indeed, he remarks that “At times, the Spirit comes to us in completely unexpected ways. So it was for me when, on 21 September 1953, as I was on my way to an annual school celebration, I was led to stop by a church and go to confession. That day changed my life and left a mark that has endured to the present day”. It is clear that the election of the Lord was not reduced to that moment “of grace”, but was repeated as “grace after grace” during the entire life of the Holy Father, “to the present day”.
- The Message relates to Pope Francis’ interest and firm desire to promote synodality as a way of being Church. Last year, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil made its *ad limina Apostolorum* visit, sharing with Pope Francis that that Church was living its third vocational year with the theme “Vocation: grace and mission”. The Successor of Peter intended to make that theme his own, inspiring the present Message, since it seemed to him an initiative that intends - as the Brazilian Bishops wrote – “to encourage each person to accept the call of Jesus as a grace, so that more hearts will burn and their feet will be on the road, in missionary outreach”.

Intervention of Msgr. Simone Renna

The recent Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* entrusts to the Dicastery for the Clergy the task of promoting vocations to the holy Order; indeed, we read in Article 114 §1: “The Dicastery assists diocesan Bishops in promoting vocations to the ordained ministry in their Churches...”.

Therefore, we would like to offer some simple suggestions for a better dissemination of the Holy Father’s Message and, more generally, relating to vocational pastoral care at diocesan, parish and family level. We are aware of the many praiseworthy initiatives already underway, and we hope that this attention to the theme of vocations may increasingly stimulate commitment in our communities.

The Message could first of all be promoted for a Vocations Prayer Vigil, in which the symphony of different vocations is manifested, all of which must be cultivated, bearing in mind their mutual relationship and dependence.

It would be appropriate to emphasize the Message during Eucharistic celebrations, referring to the Holy Father’s words during the homily and asking the Lord for the gift of many holy vocations during the prayer of the faithful.

The theme of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations could be dealt with in catechism groups of Christian initiation, youth groups, groups of newlyweds and families, as well as in seminaries.

Finally, it could also be disseminated through the websites and social channels of Christian communities.

With regard to the promotion of the pastoral care of vocations, I yield the floor to Rev Eamonn McLaughlin, coordinator of the Office for Seminaries and Formation.

Intervention of the Reverend Eamonn McLaughlin

Vocational pastoral care

In the evangelizing work of the Church, the birth, accompaniment and discernment of vocations, especially those to the diaconate and the priesthood, assume particular relevance. The Christian community, therefore, feels the need to promote priestly vocations, collaborating with the *grace* of God to pursue its own *mission*.

As the Pope writes in his Message: *We are called to a faith that bears witness*. In this task, a very relevant contribution comes from families which, as Saint Paul VI recalls, *when animated by a spirit of faith, charity and piety, constitute the first seminary*, as do parish communities. A special responsibility for the pastoral care of vocations lies with those who care for the education of young people, so as to help, accompany and encourage them to discover the divine call to follow the Lord with faith, hope and charity. Priests, therefore, are responsible for a specific loving gaze to promote vocations to the priesthood. The witness of humble and joyful priests, who lead a holy and consistent life, who love the Master and who have the smell of sheep, can certainly inspire many to follow Christ. The bishops, as those primarily responsible for those called to ministerial life, also with their witness as good pastors, encourage cooperation between priests, consecrated persons and lay people (especially parents and educators) and also with groups, movements and lay associations, within an appropriate pastoral plan.

In every parish, it would be advisable to identify a person - priest, religious or lay - or a group of the faithful, responsible for promoting the pastoral care of vocations, in love with the Lord and witness to the joy of faith. Finally, it is desirable that Vocations Centres be established and promoted in individual dioceses, regions and countries, called to promote and keep alive the need for pastoral work for vocations. All of us, the baptized, are not only collaborators, but co-responsible, of this specific initiative of the Church. May the prayer of all of us therefore be raised to Heaven, that vocations may be born and grow, conformed to the Heart of Jesus, the Supreme and Eternal Priest.
