



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE TRUSTEES OF SERRA INTERNATIONAL *Friday, 26 September 1986*

Dear Friends,

I AM PLEASED to greet you, the Trustees of Serra International, meeting in Rome. To you and your spouses I extend a very warm welcome and express my good wishes for your deliberations. Your presence here today offers me the special opportunity of reflecting on the specific apostolate of Serra International, namely, the promoting and support of vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life, and the encouragement of your own members to fulfil with ever greater zeal their Christian mission of service in the world.

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Priestly Formation, when speaking of the important work for Church vocations, stresses that "the task of fostering vocations belongs to the whole Christian community, which should do so in the first place by living in a fully Christian way". It is therefore true to say that vocations to the priesthood and religious life are a proof of the Church's vitality. We can borrow from the Gospel parable of the sower and say that just as soil proves its worth by the abundance of the harvests it produces so a local ecclesial community gives proof of its strength and maturity by the number of vocations that flourish there.

Priestly vocations are not only the proof of the strong faith life of a parish or diocese, but are also an essential condition for the Church's life. She finds her vitality in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the centre and summit of all evangelization and of full ecclesial life. Hence one sees the indispensable need for the ordained minister, who alone is able to celebrate the Eucharist. And this is not to mention the presence of the priest in the Sacrament of Penance which is the primary means established by Christ for the renewal of the soul through the gifts of conversion and reconciliation.

The Church looks with gratitude upon your apostolate of fostering vocations to the ordained ministry and religious life. In this task of promoting vocations the Church commends your persistent prayers and Christian mortification. Equally important is the "progressively more

advanced instruction of the faithful, wherein the necessity, nature and excellence of the priestly vocation will be set forth by preaching, catechetics and the various means of social communication"

With this in mind let us look to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and of the Church, as our model and guide in the fostering of Church vocations in our day. In the face of the present need, let us not give in to fear or discouragement, but rather find inspiration in the faith of Mary, "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord". She gives us confidence to pray, to sacrifice and to work for vocations, even at great personal cost.

The Spirit of Christ is ever calling men and women to dedicate themselves generously to the service of the Church. We must gather in prayer with Mary, as did the disciples after Jesus' Ascension, in expectation of the Holy Spirit's coming, so as to implore a new Pentecost of vocations that will renew the face of the earth in our own day.

I assure you of my encouragement of your worthy endeavours, and in the love of Christ I impart to all of you and your loved ones my Apostolic Blessing.

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