

EXODUS, A FUNDAMENTAL EXPERIENCE OF VOCATION

POPE FRANCIS MESSAGE FOR THE 52ND WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS



Vatican City, 14 April 2015 (VIS) “Exodus, a fundamental experience of vocation” is the title of the Holy Father’s Message for the 52nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, to be held on 26 April, the fourth Sunday of Easter.

In the text, the Pope explains that *at the root of every Christian vocation there is an exodus that starts from the renouncement of the comfort and inflexibility of the self in order to go forth trustfully, like Abraham, towards the “new land” that God indicates to us.* This dynamic is relevant not only to a personal calling, but also to the missionary and evangelical action of all the Church, truly faithful to her Master, *“to the extent that she is a Church which ‘goes forth’, a Church which is less concerned about herself, her structures and successes, and more about her ability to go out and meet God’s children wherever they are, to feel compassion (com-passio) for their hurt and pain”.* It is a dynamic towards God and towards man that fills life with joy and meaning, as Francis says to the young, urging them not to let uncertainties obstruct their dreams, and not to be afraid to go forth.

The following is the full text of the Message:

“Dear brothers and sisters,

The Fourth Sunday of Easter offers us the figure of the **Good Shepherd who knows his sheep: he calls them, he feeds them and he guides them.** For over fifty years the universal Church has celebrated this Sunday as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. *In this way she reminds us of our need to pray, as Jesus himself told his disciples, so that ‘the Lord of the harvest may send out laborers into his harvest’.* Jesus’ command came in the context of his sending out missionaries. He called not only the twelve Apostles, but another seventy-two disciples whom he then sent out, two by two, for the mission. *Since the Church ‘is by her very nature missionary’, the Christian vocation is necessarily born of the experience of mission.* Hearing and following the voice of Christ the Good Shepherd, means *letting ourselves be attracted and guided by him, in consecration to him; it means allowing the Holy Spirit to draw us into this missionary dynamism, awakening within us the desire, the joy and the courage to offer our own lives in the service of the Kingdom of God.*

To offer one’s life in mission is possible only if we are able to leave ourselves behind. On this 52nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I would like to reflect on that particular ‘exodus’ which is the heart of vocation, or better yet, of our response to the vocation God gives us. When we hear the word ‘exodus’, we immediately think of the origins of the amazing love story between God and his people, a history which passes through the dramatic period of slavery in Egypt, the calling of Moses, the experience of liberation and the journey toward the Promised Land. The Book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible, which recounts these events is a parable of the entire history of salvation, but also of the inner workings of Christian faith. Passing from the slavery of the old Adam to new life in Christ is an event of

redemption which takes place through faith. This Passover is a genuine 'exodus'; it is the journey of each Christian soul and the entire Church, the decisive turning of our lives towards the Father.



At the root of every Christian vocation we find this basic movement, which is part of the experience of faith. Belief means transcending ourselves, leaving behind our comfort and the inflexibility of our ego in order to center our life in Jesus Christ. It means leaving, like Abraham, our native place and going forward with trust, knowing that God will show us the way to a new land. This 'going forward' is not to be viewed as a sign of contempt for one's life, one's feelings, and one's own humanity. On the contrary, those who set out to follow Christ find life in abundance by putting themselves completely at the service of God and his kingdom. Jesus says: 'Everyone who has left home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will

receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life'. All of this is profoundly rooted in love. The Christian vocation is first and foremost a call to love, a love which attracts us and draws us out of ourselves, 'decentering' us and triggering "an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God'.

The exodus experience is paradigmatic of the Christian life, particularly in the case of those who have embraced a vocation of special dedication to the Gospel. This calls for a constantly renewed attitude of conversion and transformation, an incessant moving forward, a passage from death to life like that celebrated in every liturgy, an experience of Passover. From the call of Abraham to that of Moses, from Israel's pilgrim journey through the desert to the conversion preached by the prophets, up to the missionary journey of Jesus which culminates in his death and resurrection, vocation is always a work of God. He leads us beyond our initial situation, frees us from every enslavement, breaks down our habits and our indifference, and brings us to the joy of communion with him and with our brothers and sisters. Responding to God's call, then, means allowing him to help us leave ourselves and our false security behind, and to strike out on the path which leads to Jesus Christ, the origin and destiny of our life and our happiness.

This exodus process does not regard individuals alone, but the missionary and evangelizing activity of the whole Church. The Church is faithful to her Master to the extent that she is a Church which 'goes forth', a Church which is less concerned about herself, her structures and successes, and more about her ability to go out and meet God's children wherever they are, to feel compassion (com-passio) for their hurt and pain. God goes forth from himself in a Trinitarian dynamic of love: he hears the cry of his people and he intervenes to set them free. The Church is called to follow this way of being and acting. She is meant to be a Church which evangelizes, goes out to encounter humanity, proclaims the liberating word of the Gospel, heals people's spiritual and physical wounds with the grace of God, and offers relief to the poor and the suffering.

Dear brothers and sisters, this liberating exodus towards Christ and our brothers and sisters also represents the way for us to fully understand our common humanity and to foster the historical development of individuals and societies. To hear and answer the Lord's call is not a private and completely personal matter fraught with momentary emotion. Rather, it is a specific, real and total commitment which embraces the whole of our existence and sets it at the service of the growth of God's Kingdom on earth. The Christian vocation, rooted in the contemplation of the Father's heart, thus inspires us to solidarity in bringing liberation to our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest. A disciple of Jesus has a heart open to his unlimited horizons, and friendship with the Lord never means flight from this life or from the world. On the contrary, it involves a profound interplay between communion and mission.



This exodus towards God and others fills our lives with joy and meaning. I wish to state this clearly to the young, whose youth and openness to the future makes them **open-hearted and generous**. At times uncertainty, worries about the future and the problems they daily encounter can risk paralyzing their youthful enthusiasm and shattering their dreams, to the point where they can think that it is not worth the effort to get involved, that the God of the Christian faith is somehow a limit on their freedom.

Dear young friends, never be afraid to go out from yourselves and begin the journey! The Gospel is the message which brings freedom to our lives; it transforms them and makes them all the more beautiful. **How wonderful it is to be surprised by God's call, to embrace his word, and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, in adoration of the divine mystery and in generous service to our neighbors!** Your life will become richer and more joyful each day!

The Virgin Mary, model of every vocation, did not fear to utter her 'fiat' in response to the Lord's call. She is at our side and she guides us. With the generous courage born of faith, *Mary sang of the joy of leaving herself behind and entrusting to God the plans she had for her life.* Let us turn to her, so that we may be completely open to what God has planned for each one of us, so that we can grow in the desire to go out with tender concern towards others. May the Virgin Mary protect and intercede for us all".

Mother, Teacher, Path and Queen of our religious vocation and our Institute, pray for us!