MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE LEO XIV FOR THE 63rd WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

4th Sunday of Easter - 26 April 2026

[**Multimedia**]

The Interior Discovery of God's Gift

Dear brothers and sisters, dear young people!

Guided and protected by the Risen Jesus, we celebrate on the fourth Sunday of Easter — also called "Good Shepherd Sunday" — the 63rd World Day of Prayer for Vocations. It is an occasion of grace in which we share some reflections on the interior dimension of vocation, understood as the discovery of God's free gift that blossoms in the depths of our hearts. Let us explore together the truly beautiful path of life along which the Shepherd guides us.

The way of beauty

In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes himself as the "good shepherd" (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός) (*Jn* 10:11). This expression refers to a shepherd who is perfect, authentic and exemplary, inasmuch as he is ready to give his life for his sheep, thus revealing God's love. He is the Shepherd who draws us to himself, whose gaze reveals that life is truly beautiful when one follows him. Neither the eyes of the body nor aesthetic sensibilities alone are sufficient to recognize this beauty; rather, contemplation and interiority are required. Only the one who pauses, listens, prays and welcomes the Shepherd's gaze can say with confidence: "I trust him; life with him can truly be beautiful. I want to walk this path of beauty." What is most extraordinary is that, in becoming his disciple, one truly becomes "beautiful"; his beauty transforms us. As the theologian Pavel Florenskij wrote, asceticism does not produce a merely "good" person, but a "beautiful" one. [1] Indeed, more than goodness, the distinctive trait of the saint is the luminous spiritual beauty that radiates from his or her life in Christ. In this way, the Christian vocation reveals itself in all its depth as a participation in the life of Jesus, by sharing in his mission and reflecting his beauty.

This interior experience of life, faith and meaning was also that of Saint Augustine, who, in the third book of the *Confessions*, while acknowledging the sins and errors of his youth, recognizes God as "more inward than my most inward part." [2] More than self-knowledge, Augustine discovers the beauty of the divine light that guides him in the darkness. Perceiving God's presence in the innermost recesses of his soul, he came to understand the importance of caring for the interior life as a place of encounter with Christ, which is the way to experience the beauty and goodness of God in our own lives.

Such a relationship is based on prayer and silence, and when cultivated opens us to receive and actively respond to the gift of vocation. It is never an imposition or a one-size-fits-all model to which one merely conforms; instead, it is an adventure of love and happiness. Thus, on the basis of caring for the interior life, we must urgently recommence our vocational ministry and renew our commitment to evangelization.

In light of this, I invite everyone — in families, parishes and religious communities, as well as bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, educators and all the faithful — to commit themselves more fully to creating conditions that allow this gift to be embraced, nourished, protected and accompanied, so that it may bear abundant fruit. Only when our surroundings are illumined by living faith, sustained by constant prayer and enriched by fraternal accompaniment can God's call blossom and mature, becoming a path of happiness and salvation for individuals and for the world. By embarking on the path that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows us, we come to know more deeply both ourselves and the God who calls us.

Mutual awareness

"The Lord of life knows us and enlightens our hearts with his loving gaze." [3] Indeed, every vocation begins with the awareness and experience of a God who is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:16). He knows us profoundly; he has counted the hairs of our head (cf. *Mt* 10:30) and has envisaged for each person a unique path of holiness and service. Yet this awareness must always be reciprocal. We are invited to know God through prayer, listening to the Word, the Sacraments, the life of the Church and works of charity for our brothers and sisters. Like the young Samuel, who unexpectedly heard the voice of the Lord during the night and learned to recognize it with the help of Eli (cf. *1 Sam* 3:1–10), we too must create a space for interior silence in order to hear what the Lord desires for our happiness. This is not a matter of lofty ideas or scholarly learning, but of a personal encounter that transforms one's life. [4] God dwells in our hearts. A vocation entails an intimate dialogue with the One who calls and invites us to respond, despite the deafening noise of the world, with true joy and generosity.

Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas — "Do not go outside yourself. Return within yourself. Truth dwells in the inner person." [5] Once again, Saint Augustine reminds us how important it is to learn to pause and to create space for interior silence, so that we may hear the voice of Jesus Christ.

Dear young people, listen to this voice! Listen to the voice of the Lord who invites you to a full and fruitful life, calling you to put your talents to use (cf. *Mt* 25:14-30) and to unite your limitations and weaknesses with the glorious cross of Christ. Make time, then, for Eucharistic adoration; meditate faithfully on the word of God, so that you may put it into practice each day; and participate actively and fully in the sacramental and ecclesial life of the Church. In this way, you will come to know the Lord. Through the intimacy of his friendship, you will discover how to give of yourselves, whether through marriage, the priesthood, the permanent diaconate, or consecrated life. Every vocation is an immeasurable gift for the Church and for those who receive it with joy. To know the Lord means above all learning to entrust oneself to him and to his providence, which is abundant in every vocation.

Trust

Knowledge leads to confidence, a mindset that arises from faith and is essential both for welcoming one's vocation and for persevering in it. Indeed, life reveals itself as a continual act of trusting in the Lord and abandoning ourselves to him, even when his plans unsettle our own.

Let us consider Saint Joseph, who, despite the mysterious and unexpected pregnancy of the Virgin, trusted the divine message revealed in a dream and welcomed Mary and her child with an obedient heart (cf. *Mt* 1:18-25; 2:13-15). Joseph of Nazareth is an example of complete trust in God's designs. He trusted even when everything around him seemed shrouded in darkness and uncertainty, when events appeared to diverge from his own plans. He trusted and abandoned himself to God, certain about the goodness and fidelity of the Lord. "In every situation, Joseph declared his own 'fiat', like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane." [6]

As the Jubilee of Hope reminded us, it is necessary to cultivate firm and steadfast trust in God's promises, without ever yielding to despair. We must overcome fears and doubts, confident that the Lord of history — both of the world and of our own personal story — is risen. He does not abandon us in our darkest hours, but comes to dispel every shadow with his light. Through the light and strength of his Spirit, even amid trials and crises, we can see our vocation grow and mature, reflecting ever more fully the beauty of the One who has called us — a beauty shaped by fidelity and trust, despite our wounds and failures.

Maturation

Indeed, a vocation is not a fixed point, but a dynamic process of maturation sustained by intimacy with our Lord. To grow in one's vocation means being with Jesus, allowing the Holy Spirit to act in our hearts and in the circumstances of life, and reinterpreting everything in light of this gift.

Like the vine and the branches (cf. *Jn* 15:1-8), our whole lives must be rooted in a strong and vital bond with the Lord, so that we may more wholeheartedly respond to his call through our trials and necessary "pruning." The "places" where God's will is most manifest, and where we experience his infinite love, are often the authentic, fraternal bonds we establish throughout our lives. How precious it is to have a true spiritual guide to accompany us in the discovery and growth of our vocation! How important it is to discern and test the promptings of the Holy Spirit, so that a vocation can be brought to fruition in all its beauty!

A vocation, therefore, is not an immediate possession — something "given" once and for all. Instead, it is a path that unfolds much like life itself. The gift we have received must not only be protected but also nourished by a daily relationship with God in order to grow and bear fruit. "This is helpful, since it situates our whole life in relation to the God who loves us. It makes us realize that nothing is the result of pure chance but that everything in our lives can become a way of responding to the Lord, who has a wonderful plan for us." [7]

Dear brothers and sisters, dear young people, I encourage you to cultivate your personal relationship with God through daily prayer and meditation on the Word. Pause, listen and entrust yourselves. In this way, the gift of your vocation will mature, bringing you happiness and yielding abundant fruit for the Church and the world.

May the Virgin Mary, model of the interior acceptance of divine gifts and expert in prayerful listening, always accompany you on this journey!

From the Vatican, 16 March 2026

LEO PP. XIV

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[1] "Asceticism produces not a 'good' or 'kind' man but a beautiful one, and the distinguishing feature of the saintly ascetics is not their 'kindness,' which even people of the flesh, and very sinful ones, can possess, but spiritual beauty, the blinding beauty of a radiant, light-bearing person, a beauty wholly inaccessible to the man of flesh" (P. Florenskij, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, Princeton 1997, 72).

[2] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6, 11: *CSEL* 33, 53.

[3] Apostolic Letter A Fidelity that Generates the Future (8 December 2025), 5.

[4] cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est (25 December 2005), 1.

[5] Saint Augustine, *On True Religion,* XXXIX, 72: *CCSL* 32, 234.

[6] Francis, Apostolic Letter Patris Corde (8 December 2020), 3.

[7] Francis, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit (25 March 2019), 248.

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