

COME & SEE

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PROMOTION OF VOCATIONS

By Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J.

PREFACE

In his 1996 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II writes:

The invitation of Jesus, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39), is *the golden rule* of pastoral work for promoting vocations even today (no. 64).

This passage expresses so well the responsibility all believers have in promoting the gift of priesthood, religious life and other vocations to the consecrated life. The Church cannot survive without the witness of priests, religious and other consecrated persons. Unfortunately, many of us seem to have forgotten this "golden rule" and rely too much on ourselves and modern marketing methods to attract vocations.

For the Church to be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by the Lord, we must simply encourage young men and women to slow down, take stock and step away from the clutter and busy-ness of contemporary life, all so as to adequately hear the invitation of Jesus to serve Him. While vocation strategies and efforts have their rightful place, nothing can substitute for listening to the Lord in the silence of our own hearts. It is only here that we can know with conviction and certitude that Christ indeed is calling us to follow Him with an undivided heart.

In these twelve short meditations written by Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J., we are given wonderful theological reflections that get right to the heart of the matter regarding the present vocations crisis. They are straightforward and to the point, just like Christ's age-old invitation to "come and see." Those who read them will be truly inspired.

I encourage all to read these meditations prayerfully, especially in the presence of the Holy Eucharist. For in times of great crisis and suffering, Catholics must turn to prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament. In prayer before Our Eucharistic Lord, we are able directly to place into the Heart of the Lord of the Harvest all our fervent prayers and petitions. With faith we must believe that Christ will indeed listen to our heartfelt supplications and send out more laborers to serve as holy priests, religious and consecrated persons.

May this booklet, *COME & SEE*, teach us once again the "golden rule" for promoting vocations. May the Holy Spirit lead many young men and women to read it who may be discerning their own vocations and confirm that call by which Christ is leading them.

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INTRODUCTION

Christ is the ideal of the priest and religious. He is the One who calls; He is the One who gives the vocation to the priest and religious. I had the honor of working with Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J. for nearly thirty years. Father Hardon was truly an *Alter Christus* and every word he spoke and each line he wrote reflected his intimate union with Christ. This will become apparent as you read *COME & SEE*. These insightful, courageous, and deeply spiritual essays on the priesthood and consecrated life mirror the love Father Hardon had for the Church and vocations. He exhausted himself in serving Christ in an age of crisis. He promoted, cultivated and saved many vocations and various communities. These theological reflections really come from the tabernacle, for most of Father's talks and works were conceived and written before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

As advisor to Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Father Hardon had many meetings with this saintly religious and brought her to the INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE (IRL) on many occasions. Mother often talked on the joy of belonging to Jesus as a religious or priest. She stressed the necessity of community life in an age where religious were leaving communities and becoming individual contractors in a secular environment. At one of the IRL meetings Mother said, "The Church has entrusted us with the great apostolate to bring Christ into the hearts of our people. We must give Jesus to them. But unless we have Jesus, we cannot give Him. That is why we need the Eucharist. Our life is difficult; only the Eucharist, only Jesus can give us the joy of doing the work with a smile." You will see Jesus in Father Hardon's reflections for he had Jesus to give and was inspired by Him before the tabernacle. Like his dear friend Blessed Mother Teresa, he worked tirelessly for Jesus and his Church in promoting vocations. I can testify that Father Hardon never wasted a minute. At an IRL board meeting our first president, Bishop James Hogan, told him: "John it is not a sin to take a day off!" Father Hardon replied with his impish grin, "Well Bishop, maybe not a mortal sin *but . . .*" The joy of belonging to and working for Jesus was evident on his face. You, dear reader, will see the face of Christ in Father Hardon's words and the joy he had in serving His Church.

Every vocation director and indeed every Catholic who wishes to see Christ's vineyard filled with workers ought to meditate prayerfully on these reflections daily. Father Hardon founded the IRL precisely for this purpose: to cultivate and promote vocations so that God would be praised and His people served.

May Mary, Mother of the Church and Vocations, intercede for the Church and for all priestly, religious and consecrated vocations. We pray that she will also intercede in heaven so that Father Hardon will be finally raised to the altar of the Church for he was truly a saintly priest and dedicated religious in an age of crisis.

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A CATHOLIC PRIEST?

What is a Catholic priest? He is a man ordained by Christ to continue the Savior's work of redemption until the end of time. He is therefore a person specially chosen to proclaim the Gospel of salvation and lead the faithful to their final destiny. But he is mainly a person who receives unique powers at ordination to consecrate and sacrifice, and to reconcile a sinful people with their God.

As one who proclaims the Good News, a priest is given the grace not only to teach the truths of revelation but to inspire his hearers to follow what he teaches. As a leader of believers, he is to be the primary former and sustainer of a Christian community.

What makes a Catholic priest most distinctive, however, and by divine will sets him apart from other men is the power that Christ gives him over the Holy Eucharist and over the sins of mankind.

No one but a priest can change bread and wine into the living Christ. At his words of consecration, what had been bread and wine cease to be bread and wine, so that only the appearances remain. What becomes present is Jesus, the Son of God who became the Son of Mary, now on earth in all the fullness of His divinity and humanity, and with all the qualities that make Jesus Christ who He is.

No one but a priest can offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, in which the same Jesus who surrendered Himself on Calvary now offers Himself in the Mass, through the hands of His priest.

No one but a priest can absolve sinners and restore them to friendship with the Creator whom they have offended.

No wonder the Church is so concerned that priests remain faithful to their high calling. In God's ordinary providence, their perseverance is a condition for the perseverance of the faithful. "Like priest like people" is not a clever phrase, but the verdict of almost 2000 years of the Church's history.

But perseverance in the priesthood is impossible without the grace of God, made available through prayer. Only priests who pray can persevere. The people must also pray, in our day as never before, for the priests of the world. On their fidelity to Christ depends the salvation of more souls than we shall ever know, until eternity.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS VOCATION?

A vocation to the religious/consecrated life is a special grace that God gives to certain persons, calling them to a life of the evangelical counsels. There is more than passing value in stressing the fact that a religious vocation is a grace. It is, therefore, a gift and an opportunity that must be freely responded to if the grace is not to remain sterile and ineffective. We used to speak, and perhaps still do, of promoting religious vocations. Actually, we cannot promote vocations. Either God gives them or they don't exist. We can only discover what God has given and then foster a vocation that is presumably there.

But how do you discover a true vocation? The expression "true vocation" is not casual. It is critically important in an age when so many once-promising vocations seem to have been lost.

What are some typical features of a true vocation to the consecrated life? I would emphasize especially three:

1. a strong faith in the Catholic Church and her teaching, shown by a firm loyalty to the Vicar of Christ;
2. a love of prayer, at least the capacity for developing a desire for prayer;
3. a readiness to give oneself to a life of sacrifice in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

The practical question arises of how to recognize a true vocation to the consecrated life. The need for recognizing a vocation is so important that everything else is secondary. I believe that if every prospective candidate were to make a private retreat, even for a few days, under a competent priest, it would help immensely. The retreat could be especially geared to a person who thinks that he or she has a vocation to the consecrated life. Then, during the retreat, in an atmosphere of silence and prayer, ask God to enlighten one's mind as to whether or not He is calling the person to a life of Christian perfection.* This, in fact, is one of the original purposes of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius: to discover and decide on one's state of life.

The future of consecrated life is very promising, but the promise depends on certain premises, of which the first and most important is that God has given not just the initial call but the assurance of a lifetime of His supernatural grace to those who want to serve Him in the consecrated life.

* Editor's note: "A life of Christian perfection" is a traditional phrase often used to refer to the consecrated life, whose specific, exclusive goal is perfection. The lay life has perfection as its general goal, but its immediate goal is to build up family and societal life.

CHAPTER 3

VOCATIONS AND THE COMMITMENT CRISIS

With the dwindling number of entrants into seminaries and novitiates, we naturally ask, "What happened?" And we are inclined to put the blame where it does not belong, on a lack of vocations. It is high time we took a hard look at the facts and draw some obvious, even though painful, conclusions.

In theological language a vocation comes from Christ. He calls some people to follow Him in the priesthood or consecrated life by giving them the graces they need to recognize this call, respond to it, and remain faithful for a lifetime to the special call they have received.

A vocation, therefore, is the grace of invitation. But, like the rich young man in the Gospel, those who receive the grace may refuse even to accept the invitation; or, like Peter, may struggle for a long time before they fully surrender to Christ; or like Judas, they may be seduced by what the world offers them and betray the Master whom they had known and for a time had followed.

When the grace of vocation is freely accepted and generously lived out, this is commitment. Vocations come from God's free choice of certain individuals; commitment comes from our free choice to cooperate with the graces received. Without a vocation, there would be lacking the necessary grace; without a commitment the grace would remain sterile and bear no fruit in the spiritual or apostolic life.

We return to where we began and repeat the question, "What happened?" Why the drastic fall in the number of stable priests and religious in affluent countries like the United States? We dare not say that God has been wanting in His gift of vocations. We must say that men and women have been wanting in their commitment.

What we are facing today is a massive failure in every state of life to make a lifetime commitment. And though the phenomenon is familiar from the dawn of Christianity, it has reached an all time low in the present century. Where? Wherever Christ and His teaching are dismissed as antiquated mythology.

Chesterton once wrote an essay on "A Defense of Rash Vows" that beautifully describes the modern situation. He explains how modern rejection of vows has tragically affected the historic commitment set down by Christ for the sacrament of marriage. The quotation from Chesterton is long but worth giving – and remembering:

The revolt against vows has been carried on in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words – "free love" – as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind oneself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word. Modern sages offer to the lover, with an ill-favored grin, the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; but they do not respect him as the old Church respected him; they do

not write his oath upon the heavens, as the record of his highest moment. They give him every liberty except the liberty to sell his liberty, which is the only one that he wants.

Until we rediscover the true meaning of love, which gives itself – sells itself, if you will – to the one it claims to love, we shall continue trying to promote vocations. But the real need is to promote *commitment*. Priests and religious, no less than married people, must be taught and trained in the true meaning of love.

CHAPTER 4

THE CATHOLIC FAMILY AND VOCATIONS

Where are vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life mainly fostered? In strong Catholic families. When do these vocations flourish? When Catholic families flourish. When do vocations wane? When Catholic family life is weak.

If this is true, then whatever we can do to stabilize Catholic family life and strengthen family ties among the faithful will promote good vocations to the service of the Church.

It is not hard to find reasons for this. After all, whatever else a true vocation to the priesthood or the consecrated life implies, it always means that a person is called to an above-average practice of virtue in the following of Christ. Concretely this means having the generosity to spend a lifetime in serving others without counting the cost. It means having the humility to work under authority for the common good. And above all it means having the charity, born of grace, to give up some of life's most precious possessions and prospects out of love for God.

The family is the divinely instituted place for generosity, humility and charity first to take root and, with divine assistance, to be cultivated from infancy, through childhood and adolescence, into adult life.

We speak so casually about grace building on virtue that we are liable to miss the profound implications of what we are saying. The grace of vocations needs good soil in which to be planted, and the proper conditions to develop under God's supernatural care. There is no soil more necessary and no conditions are more important than a good family life.

Certainly God is master of His gifts and He can, if He wishes, dispense with these provisions of nature. Good vocations have come from very unlikely backgrounds and in spite of the most adverse home situations. But these exceptions only prove the rule.

In His ordinary providence, however, the Lord prepares those He plans to choose by making sure they are reared in a family where generosity as self-sacrifice is shown to their children and required of them by the parents; where humility is a way of life because father and mother exercise their authority with kindness but with a firm and steady hand; and where charity, as the love of God, is instilled in the children by the practice of prayer and respect for religion that becomes almost the family atmosphere.

No one who knows what is going on in modern western society has any illusions about the status of the family. Irresponsible fathers, absentee mothers, neglected children, broken homes are becoming commonplace in one country after another.

We have no choice. We who believe that Christ is God, believe that He has not neglected His people. But we must do our part. We must strive by all manner of means to preserve sound Christian values in the family and restore them where they have been lost. And we must beg the Lord of the harvest to produce laborers for His vineyard by providing such families as are the normal seedbed of vocations in the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER 5

THE EUCHARIST AND VOCATIONS

It is impossible to exaggerate the close relation between the Holy Eucharist and vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life.

This is only to be expected once we realize that every vocation is a special grace from God, and the greatest source of grace we have is the Eucharist – as *Presence, Sacrifice, and Communion*.

Faith tells us that Christ is really present on our altars, that He really offers Himself in the Mass, and that we really receive Him in Holy Communion. In each case, the Living Christ is now inspiring men and women to give themselves to Him with all their hearts and follow Him in the extension of His Kingdom.

The Eucharist, therefore, is the best way to foster vocations. This means that persons who attend Mass, receive Communion and invoke Christ in the Blessed Sacrament obtain light and strength that no one else has a claim to.

The Eucharist is also the best way to recognize vocations. Show me a man or woman devoted to the Eucharist and I will show you a person who is an apt subject for the priesthood or the consecrated life.

The Eucharist is finally the infallible way of preserving one's vocation. This is especially true of devotion to the Real Presence. Is it any wonder that saintly priests and religious over the centuries have been uncommonly devoted to the Blessed Sacrament? They know where to obtain the help they need to remain faithful to their vocations. It is from the same Christ Who called them and Who continues to sustain them in His consecrated service.

Vocations begin with the Eucharist; they are developed through the Eucharist; and they are preserved by the Eucharist. All of this is true because the Eucharist is Jesus Christ, still on earth, working through men and women whom He calls to share His plan for salvation.

CHAPTER 6

VOCATIONS AND PRAYER

A vocation is a special grace that God gives to certain people to serve Him in the priesthood or the consecrated life. He gives this grace, as Christ Himself told us, in answer to prayer. Whose prayer for whom? The prayer of the faithful for others; the prayer of the faithful for certain persons; and the prayer of individuals for themselves.

What does this mean? It means that, in God's ordinary providence, vocations are the fruit of prayer. He will inspire men and women to dedicate themselves to His service: if enough people are praying earnestly enough for vocations in the Church; if we pray for certain persons that God might call them to the priesthood or a lifelong consecration in the Church; and if young people from their early years are encouraged to ask the Lord of the harvest to call them, if it is His will, to labor in His vineyard.

We mistakenly assume that some people just receive the grace of vocation and always respond to it. Not so. Vocations are the result of prayer twice over. Once because without prayer, much prayer, God will not commonly offer the grace of a vocation. And once again because, without prayer, vocations offered by God may not even be recognized by those who receive them or, if recognized, will not be generously responded to.

There is one more aspect of prayer and vocations that should be stressed. The grace of a vocation is not a once-and-for-all favor from God. It is a lifelong invitation that those who are called must continue hearing and continue answering all through life if they are to persevere in their calling. Prayer is a normal condition for perseverance.

It has been said that the faithful get the priests and religious they deserve. This is a sober reminder that if we are to have the number of priests and religious we need; if we are to have the holy men and women of God we want; and if they are to remain loyal until death in their commitment, someone must do a lot of praying and must join prayer with sacrifice. Of course the first ones on whom this obligation rests are the priests and religious themselves. But then it extends to all the People of God.

CHAPTER 7

SUFFERING AND VOCATIONS

When did Christ redeem the world? When He died on Good Friday. How did Christ redeem the world? By His Passion and Death on Calvary. Why do we make the Sign of the Cross? To remind ourselves we have been redeemed by the Cross.

Of course we know that Christ, the First Apostle, was sent by the Father to save mankind by every word and action He performed during His visible stay on earth. But it was especially by His sufferings that we were delivered from sin and mainly by His Cross that we were saved.

We need to recall these truths in our day, when activism is being honored far beyond what it deserves. Some people feel "useless" because they are no longer as "active" in the service of others as they formerly were or as they would like to be.

They may suffer in a variety of ways: with some draining disease or crippling disability; with a natural, but no less painful, weakening of their bodily powers as they advance in years; with the awful sense of being no longer needed after decades of active service in the priesthood, consecrated life, single state or in rearing a family. Or the Lord may touch them early and they are disabled or confined or gravely handicapped in the prime of life.

No matter. The number of such persons in our society is large, and larger than most people would ever suppose. What they need to be told is that they can actually do more for others now than they ever could before.

Why should this be so? Because we serve others best when we do most for their souls. And we do most for their souls when we obtain graces from God for their numerous spiritual needs. If this means prayer, and it does, there is no more effective prayer than one that is joined with sacrifice, which in practice means prayer that is animated by the cheerful acceptance of the Cross.

The apostolate of suffering is not some exotic enterprise for only mystics or what we sometimes call "victim souls." It is open to everyone who has faith, and love, and zeal for souls. Faith assures us that suffering must be noble, seeing that God became man in order to suffer and thereby save the world. Love enables us to make of every pain a willing sacrifice, seeing that it costs us so much. And zeal for souls urges us actually to rejoice as we are privileged to suffer something for the myriad souls redeemed by the blood of Christ.

He did His part to reconcile this sinful world with the Father. But the mercy that He merited by His Cross will remain sterile unless sinners cooperate with the graces He won for mankind. We must unite our cross with the Savior's to help sinners respond to God's mercy.

With St. Paul we can say to others what he told the Christians of his day: "It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that is still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His Body, the Church" (Col 1:24). Christ is still redeeming the world, with our cooperation.

CHAPTER 8

SACRIFICE AND VOCATIONS

Every vocation is born of sacrifice, is maintained by sacrifice and is measured in the apostolate by the sacrifice of those whom God calls to the priesthood or the consecrated life. This should not be surprising, once we realize that it was by His sacrifice that Christ redeemed the world. The servant is not greater than his Master. In fact, the more intimate is one's vocation to the service of Christ, the more demanding will be the sacrifices required.

Barring an extraordinary grace from God, He generally calls those persons to follow Him as priests or religious, who have been taught the value of sacrifice from childhood. The experience of self-denial in the use and enjoyment of material things is the normal predisposition for a lifetime practice of evangelical poverty. Training in self-control of the senses, especially in the use of the media, is the ordinary preparation for a lifelong dedication to consecrated chastity. Careful and loving nurture in self-denial, almost from infancy, is God's usual way of conditioning the human will for commitment to the counsel of obedience.

If sacrifice in childhood and young adulthood is the seedbed of vocations, continued fidelity in serving the Church is impossible without the habit of self-surrender. There are many reasons for the tragic loss of so many once-dedicated persons in affluent countries like America. But surely one of these reasons is the prior loss of a willingness to give in to the sometimes hard demands of Christ's love. We may, therefore, say that vocations are nourished on sacrifice as the body is sustained on food. Or, as the Savior told His followers – and bade them follow His example – “My meat is to do the will of Him Who sent Me” (Jn 4:34).

Sacrifice is finally the condition and norm of apostolic work in the priesthood and consecrated life. Who have been the great achievers in the vineyard of the Lord over the centuries? Have they not been the men and women who never said, "Enough" in their zeal for souls; who labored, like St. Paul, in season and out of season, selflessly and exhaustingly; who never counted the cost in time or effort or personal preference; in a word, who lived lives of heroic sacrifice?

All of this is common knowledge for those who have come to know Christ Who, "having joy set before Him, chose the Cross" (Heb 12:2). But this kind of knowledge needs to be taught – and learned – if the vocations which the Church so desperately needs are to be fostered and preserved in our day.

CHAPTER 9

CONFESSION AND VOCATIONS

The sacrament of confession is closely related to priestly and religious vocations. It is not too much to say, in most cases, that the sacrament of penance is a condition for recognizing, following, and remaining faithful to a vocation. How so?

Recognizing: It is safe to say that those called by Christ are all sinners. They differ only in the degree of their sinfulness. In God's ordinary providence those who have received a call to follow Christ in the priesthood or the consecrated life have no choice. Even to recognize they have a vocation, they must either acquire or maintain the habit of frequent confession.

Nothing so blinds the mind in recognizing a vocation as sin. Nothing so forces the mind to hear Christ's call as reduction in sin. So true is this that we can paraphrase the sixth Beatitude to read, "Blessed are the sinless of heart, for they shall see the will of God" (cf. Mt 5:8).

Frequent confession, as recommended by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, enables young persons to see what state of life God wants them to embrace. This is especially true if they are called to serve God in a lifetime commitment as priests or religious.

Following: No less than sin blinds the intellect, so it weakens the will to accept the vocation to which the Savior calls certain people to "follow Me" (cf. Mt 4:19).

Again, reception of the sacrament of penance strengthens the will to respond to Christ's invitation. Every sin we commit lessens our willpower to say "yes" to God. In the Church's history, we read how often a single fervent sacramental confession has converted a great sinner and inspired the convert to become a great saint.

So, too, frequent confession elevates the natural power of human freedom to give oneself to Christ without reserve.

Persevering: We are living in what some have called the most unstable period in two millennia of Christianity. One reason for this is that so many once-believing Christians have lost their sense of sin. *Whatever Happened to Sin* is not only the title of a well-known book. It is a commentary on the moral condition of western society.

Frequent confession is, therefore, not only a proven means of recognizing and following a vocation. It is also a most effective way of insuring perseverance in the priesthood or a life of the evangelical counsels.

You might say this stands to reason. It is also confirmed by the Church's experience. As we become more detached from sin, we become more generous in our response to Christ's love.

I know of nothing more certain to stabilize the priesthood and consecrated life in our day, than the restoration of the practice of frequent confession.

The teaching of Pope Pius XII could not be more clear. His words deserve to be memorized:

The sacrament of penance is the masterpiece of God's goodness. By it our weakness is fortified (cf. *Menti Nostrae*, no. 52)

It is true that venial sins may be expiated in many ways which are to be highly commended. But to ensure more rapid progress day by day in the path of virtue, We desire that the pious practice of frequent confession, which was introduced into the Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, should be earnestly advocated. By it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and an increase of grace is secured by the very fact that the sacrament is received (cf. *Mystici Corporis Christi*, no. 88).

Frequent confession is eminently valuable for every state of life. It is imperative for discovering, maintaining, and sustaining the vocation of those who are called by the Redeemer to follow Him "the whole way."

CHAPTER 10

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND VOCATIONS

Vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life depend on good religious education as the harvest depends on a good soil. Vocations prosper when religious education in the home and school is true to its Catholic heritage: when parents and teachers seriously proclaim the Faith of our Fathers, when they train the young in the Christian virtues of obedience, chastity and selfless charity, and lead the souls under their care to a healthy fear of sin and a loving devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

On the other hand, where sound religious education is neglected it is either tempting Providence or asking for a miracle to expect vocations to flourish. And no amount of effort to adjust seminaries or novitiates to an alleged "new age of freedom" will attract young people to give themselves to the consecrated service of the Church.

This has profound implications for both the home and school. The breakdown of family life has had devastating consequences on priestly and religious vocations. The secularization of large segments of once-thriving Catholic schools has reduced vocations in some parts of the United States to the vanishing point.

Where have vocations over the centuries been most prosperous if not in places where the seeds of Faith were sown and nourished by believing parents and teachers? The same is true today. Either we wake up to this fact of supernatural history or our present situation will not only not improve but become more serious with every passing year.

Two basic recommendations. Whatever is done to strengthen the Catholic family, to keep father and mother together and to inspire them to educate their children in the fear and love of God is the first and single most effective means of giving the Church the vocations she needs to carry on the mission entrusted to her by the Redeemer.

So, too, whatever is done to preserve Catholic schools, to make certain they are teaching the Church's doctrine in complete loyalty to Christ and His Vicar on earth, and protecting the schools from the violence of modern secularism, is a sure way of obtaining the priests and religious that the world needs.

Why does the world need priests and religious? Because it needs the graces that are channeled by the Sacrifice of the Mass and merited by a lifetime sacrifice of self under the vows.

CHAPTER 11

MARY, MOTHER OF VOCATIONS

When Mary told the angel at the Annunciation, "Behold, I am the Handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), she became the patroness of every priest and

religious until the end of time. Her acceptance of God's invitation to become His Mother made her the Mother of all vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

When she conceived Jesus Christ, she brought into the world the One from whom every vocation is derived. Except for Him, no one would be called, and except for His call, no one could respond. Mary is, therefore, Mother of Vocations because she is the Mother of the Great High Priest who calls others to share in His priesthood, and she is Mother of the First Religious who invites others to follow in His footsteps.

Mary is Mother of Vocations also by her example. It is by imitating her practice of faith, hope and charity that men and women are inspired to give themselves to her Son in the priesthood or the lifetime practice of the counsels. Only believers have a vocation; only those who trust implicitly in God's promises respond to God's call; and above all only those who love God in others deeply are preserved in priestly or religious commitment. In all of these, Mary is their model, and the more devoted they are to her, the more secure is their consecration.

Finally, Mary is the Mother of Vocations by her heavenly intercession at the Throne of God. It is through her maternal prayers that Christ gives certain people the grace to give themselves entirely to His service. She obtains from Him the grace for them to be called; but she also tells them, as she told the servants at Cana, to be sure to do whatever He tells you (cf. Jn 2:5).

There is no more effective way of fostering vocations than asking the Mother of Jesus to ask her Son to extend the invitation. And there is no more effective way of remaining firm in the priesthood and the religious state than to beg the same Mother for the grace of perseverance.

"Mary, Mother of Vocations, pray for us," should be our daily invocation.

CHAPTER 12

ST. JOSEPH AND VOCATIONS

There are many good reasons why St. Joseph should be the special heavenly patron of dedicated souls – in the consecrated life, in the priesthood, and among the laity. But as the Church teaches, he is especially to be venerated and his patronage invoked because he was the guardian of the Virgin Mary and the foster-father of Jesus.

The dignity of the Mother of God is so sublime that nothing created can rank above it. But as Joseph was united to the Blessed Virgin by the ties of marriage, we may believe that he approached nearer than anyone else to the eminent dignity by which the Mother of God surpasses all human persons in holiness. Marriage is the most intimate of all unions, which from its essence confers a sharing of gifts between those joined together in wedlock. Thus, in giving Joseph the Blessed Virgin as his spouse, God appointed him to be not only the witness of her virginity, the protector of her honor, but also, because they were truly married, a sharer in her exalted sanctity.

Joseph shines above all mankind by the august privilege of his vocation as the foster-father of the Son of God and, therefore, the diligent protector of Christ.

From this two-fold dignity flows the obligation which nature lays on the heads of families, so that Joseph became the administrator and legal defender of the Holy Family. He set himself to defend with a mighty love and a daily concern his spouse and the Divine Infant. Regularly by his work he earned what was necessary for the one and the other for nourishment and clothing. He guarded the Child from death when threatened by Herod's jealousy, and found for him a refuge in Egypt. In the miseries of the journey and in the bitterness of exile, he was ever the companion, the helper, and the upholder of Jesus and His Virgin Mother.

We may confidently say that the Holy Family which Joseph ruled with the authority of a father contained within itself the first beginnings of the Church. So that, even as Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of Christ, so Joseph is the Protector of Holy Church because he was the guardian of Jesus and Mary.

Dearest St. Joseph, I consecrate myself to your service. I give myself to you, that you may always be my father, my protector, and my guide in the way of salvation. Obtain for me a great purity of heart, a fervent love of the interior life, and the spirit of prayer.

After your example may I do all my actions for the greater glory of God, in union with the Divine Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And you, blessed St. Joseph, pray for me, that I may share in the peace and joy of your holy death. Amen.

APPENDIX I

EUCHARISTIC HOLY HOUR FOR VOCATIONS

Opening Prayer:

Prayer of the Angel at Fatima

My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly and I offer You the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifferences whereby He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.

Gospel Reading:

The next day, John again was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "Where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour (Jn 1:35-39).

Silent Reflection or Spiritual Reading:

Take time to reflect prayerfully upon this Gospel passage or read one of Fr. Hardon's theological reflections found in the front of this booklet or from some other spiritual source. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart and soul and to fill your mind with insight on how best to respond to Christ's invitation to follow Him as His disciple and co-worker.

Rosary for Priestly and Religious Vocations:

Spend time reciting the Holy Rosary and imploring the Immaculate Heart of Mary for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life within the Church.

Devotional Prayers:

Acts of Faith, Hope and Love

My God, I firmly believe that Thou art one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe that Thy divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which Thy holy Catholic Church teaches, because Thou hast revealed them, who canst neither deceive nor be deceived.

My God, relying on Thy almighty power and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain the pardon of my sins, the assistance of Thy grace, and life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

My God, I love Thee above all things with my whole heart and soul, because Thou art all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of Thee. I forgive all who have injured me and ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

Intercessory Prayers:

Lord Jesus Christ, sublime model of all perfection, You not only unceasingly urge privileged souls to strive toward this lofty goal, but also move them by the mighty power of Your grace to follow You in this exalted path. Grant that many may hear and willingly obey Your loving inspiration and embrace the religious life, where they will enjoy Your special solicitude and tender care.

-Grant there may never be lacking devoted servants of Your own charity to take Your place day and night at the side of the orphan, at the bed of the sick, near the old and infirm who otherwise might not find a helping hand stretched out to them.

-Grant that in classrooms and universities the voice of those who teach may be the echo of Your own, pointing out the way to heaven and inculcating the duties incumbent on each and all.

-Grant that no land, however distant or inhospitable, may be deprived of the gospel message that invites all men to enter Your kingdom.

-Grant that the flames of that charity, which must one day spread over and consume the whole earth and in which shines forth in all its splendor the unblemished holiness of Your Church, may be multiplied and grow ever more ardent.

-Grant that in every part of the world choice souls may flourish – souls that by contemplation and penance offer reparation for the crimes of mankind and draw down Your pity.

-Grant that in the constant immolation of these hearts, in the spotless purity of these lives, in the heroism of their virtue may be ever present on the earth that perfect model of the children of God which You came to reveal to us.

Into the ranks of Your beloved and chosen ones send many good vocations: souls firmly resolved to make themselves worthy of the great grace offered them and of the holy institute they aspire to join, through the exact observance of their religious duties, by assiduous prayer, constant mortification, and the perfect conformity of their will with all that is Your will.

Enlighten, O Lord Jesus, many generous hearts with the ardent rays of Your Holy Spirit, eternal and substantial love; and by the powerful intercession of Your most loving mother, Mary, enkindle and sustain the fervor of Your love in these hearts, for the glory of the Father and of the same Holy Spirit, who live and reign with You eternally. Amen.

(Prayer composed by Pope Pius XII)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

O Good Jesus Prayer

O good Jesus	
Word of the Father, convert me	<i>O good Jesus</i>
Son of Mary, receive me among the children of the Virgin Mary,	“
My Master, teach me,	“
Prince of Peace, pacify me,	“
My Refuge, accept me,	“
My Shepherd, nourish me,	“
My Patience, strengthen me,	“
My Savior, redeem me,	“
My Lord and my God, possess me,	“
The right Way, direct me,	“
Eternal Truth, instruct me,	“
Blessed Life, enliven me,	“
My Constancy, confirm me,	“
Light of the world, enlighten me,	“
My Justice, justify me,	“
My Mediator, to Your Father reconcile me,	“
Physician of my soul, heal me,	“
My Judge, absolve me,	“
My King, rule me,	“
My Holiness, sanctify me,	“
Abyss of goodness, absorb me,	“
Living Bread come down from heaven, fill me,	“
My Father, as Your prodigal son, receive me,	“
My Happiness, refresh me,	“

My Assistance, help me, “
Magnet of love, attract me, “
My Protector, defend me, “
My Hope, encourage me, “
My Love, make me love You, “
Source of life, cleanse me, “
My Propitiation, purify me, “
My Reward, grant I may keep You, “
My Glory, glorify me, “
Amen.

Concluding Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us in the sacrament of your body and blood. May we offer to our Father in heaven a solemn pledge of undivided love. May we offer to our brothers and sisters a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.