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UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI AL GIUBILEO DEL SERRA INTERNATIONAL

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Alle 11.30 di questa mattina, nella Basilica Vaticana, il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha incontrato i partecipanti al Giubileo del Serra International ed ha loro rivolto il discorso che pubblichiamo di seguito:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Cari soci del «Serra International»!

1. Sono lieto di vivere con voi questo intenso momento spirituale, in occasione del vostro pellegrinaggio giubilare alle tombe degli Apostoli Pietro e Paolo.

Saluto Monsignor Justin Francis Rigali, Arcivescovo di Saint Louis, e lo ringrazio per le cordiali parole che mi ha rivolto a vostro nome. Estendo il mio saluto a tutti voi, che siete qui convenuti da varie nazioni.

Voi portate in questa celebrazione il segno spirituale che vi contraddistingue: mi riferisco alla percezione particolarmente viva dell'esistenza cristiana come «vocazione». "Non voi avete scelto me, ma io ho scelto voi..." (Gv 15, 16): questa parola rivolta da Cristo agli Apostoli si estende ad ogni battezzato. Dobbiamo averne consapevolezza gioiosa e grata. Venendo ad implorare la grazia giubilare, voi siete venuti appunto ad aprirvi con nuova disponibilità alla *chiamata fondamentale ricevuta nel battesimo*, rinnovando la scelta radicale di coerenza cristiana e di santità.

2. Your baptismal calling leads you towards others: it is essentially a missionary calling, as you have learned from the example of Blessed Junipero Serra, the great evangelizer of California. Following in his footsteps, you have come to share in the heartfelt concern of Christ himself: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few!" (Mt 9:37; Lk 10:2). How can we fail to feel the timeliness and urgency of these words! The horizon of the Lord's "harvest" is indeed limitless, if we consider not only the pastoral needs of the Church herself but also the immense number of people who still await the first proclamation of the Gospel. Amid all the complexity of the present time, now, at the dawn of a new millennium, we need to recognize the search for meaning – a real yet often silent search – which is spreading through society. There is an unexpressed sense of need for Christ rising up from young people, from the world of culture, and from the great ethical and social challenges of our time. In

order to respond to this need, the whole Church must become completely *ministerial*, a community of heralds and witnesses, rich in *labourers for the harvest*.

3. It is really God himself, the "Lord of the harvest", who chooses his labourers; his call is always undeserved and unexpected. And yet, in the mystery of God's covenant with us, we are called to cooperate with his providence, and to use the powerful tool which he has placed in our hands: *prayer!* This is what Jesus himself asked us to do: "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest!" (*Mt 9:38*).

Dear Serrans, you are committed in a special way to promoting vocations. Never forget that yours must be above all a *commitment to prayer*, prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful *key* to resolving the vocations question. But at the same time prayer for vocations is also a school of life, as I had occasion recently to point out: "By praying for vocations we learn to look with Gospel wisdom at the world and at each person's need for life and salvation; it is a way of sharing in Christ's love and compassion for all mankind..." (*Message for the XXXVIII World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, 14 September 2000, No. 6).

4. Along with prayer, the work of fostering vocations also requires a constant effort to bring the need to people's attention through personal witness, so that God's call may encounter a ready hearing and generous response in those to whom it is directed. This is the aim of your efforts to spread an authentic *culture of vocations*.

The Christian community urgently needs to realize that promoting vocations is more than simply a matter of "programmes". It is something that touches the very mystery of the Church. Vocations in fact are relative to the very meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ, formed and enlivened by the Holy Spirit with all the wealth of his gifts. The Second Vatican Council reminded us of this: "In the building up of Christ's body there is a variety of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes his different gifts for the welfare of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 7). Within the People of God, there is a specific mission awaiting each one. Because the needs of the "harvest" are so great, all the members of God's People must grow in the awareness of "being called". Significant are the gifts and tasks associated with the involvement of Christians in the temporal order. These are above all the responsibility of the laity. But a relevance all their own belongs to the ministries directed to the guidance and growth in holiness of the ecclesial community, namely the priesthood and the consecrated life. As Serrans you understand this, and members of the laity that you are, you are committed to fostering such vocations.

5. In questo quadro ecclesiale si colloca, cari Serrani, il vostro impegno per la pastorale vocazionale. Dedicandovi ad essa, voi fate in modo che il problema delle vocazioni non rimanga un assillo dei soli Pastori, ma trovi riscontro nella sensibilità di tutti, coinvolgendo in particolare le famiglie e gli educatori. E questo è di vitale importanza.

Continuate a dare a tal fine il vostro contributo, in piena sintonia con i vostri Vescovi. Siate persone di comunione, ponendovi con affetto operoso accanto ai sacerdoti. Venite incontro, con la carità che vi distingue, alle esigenze delle vocazioni povere. Il bene che da questo rifluisce sulla Chiesa sarà pegno di abbondanti doni celesti, che volentieri invoco su ciascuno di voi e sul vostro movimento per la materna intercessione di Maria, Vergine Immacolata.

Con tali sentimenti, tutti di gran cuore vi benedico.

[02760-XX.01] [Testo originale: Plurilingue]
