

Vocation Day

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Everywhere in the world today, there is a lack of priests, religious and people who will devote themselves completely to the service of the Church. While the number of Catholics is constantly on the rise and work in the diocese is constantly progressing, the number of people working for the Church and the faithful is not increasing in the same proportion. This situation is becoming serious in our diocese. The lack of vocations among the local Chinese population has severely affected the development of the Church here. Many evangelical and missionary activities cannot be effectively carried out due to the lack of suitable energy. The ultimate reason for this is the shortage of priests and religious. We, as members of the Church, should do our best to remedy the situation by seeking out, promoting and cultivating vocations. Let us pool our efforts to solve this problem.

Does the problem exist because there are really no young people in Hong Kong who respond to their vocations?

The majority of the 260,000 Catholics in the diocese are young. Many of them have already generously given up their time and enjoyment to join religious lay associations. They play an active part in the diocese and in their own parishes, bearing witness to Christ and serving both the Church and the community of Hong Kong. Unfortunately, their answer to Christ's special call is still negative. Nevertheless, they already possess excellent qualifications and strong potential for the work of promoting vocations. The question is whether there are suitable methods of seeking out, promoting and cultivating these vocations.

The answer to vocation naturally depends on the young people themselves. Today, more than ever before, the young have a sense of justice and especially suited for answering the call. Some years ago, in his Vocation Day message, the Holy Father stated thus: "Youths of today can and should listen to the Lord's call. Christ tells them that everywhere in the world, the fields are ripe and ready for harvest; but priests and religious are lacking... The Church - lively yet cautious, active yet serene - needs the energy of young people... Souls thirsting for truth, cities awaiting salvation, the starving waiting to be fed, the mourning of the victims of injustice, the cries of the destitute - these reiterate to our youths Christ's call in the parable: "Why do you stand here idle all day? You go into the vineyard too." (Matthew 20:6)

My dear young brothers and sisters, are you willing to accept this call?

One fact is evident: In these fast-moving times, young people who have the courage to take up this challenge are indeed rare. There are many reasons for this: the attraction of worldly objects, for instance, or bad example will make them hesitate and fear commitment. But have we ever asked ourselves how much we have done to help them to listen to the Lord's call and to encourage them to recognize the importance of the work of the clergy and of society's needs today?

We therefore appeal to all priests, religious, Catholic teachers, spiritual directors of societies and all the faithful in Hong Kong to work together in seeking out, promoting and cultivation vocations.

We direct our appeal in particular, to Catholic parents, asking for their cooperation. The family is the cradle of vocation. As we know, the seedlings of many vocations grow and the wishes of many youths with vocations are realized, because of encouragement from their parents. Unfortunately, many seeds of vocation also fail to grow and many youths' wishes and efforts are frustrated, because of the lack of encouragement and support from their parents.

"Rear a child for your old age; save up grain for a famine". This may be a common view among parents who do not wish their children to answer to God's call. For them, to have their children become priests or sisters means losing support. Let them not forget that God will not allow our generosity to exceed His reward. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward, and God's reward will be a hundredfold.

In the past few years, many of our ordained priests have come from non-Catholic families. If their parents could show such generosity, how can our Catholic parents be indifferent?

Vocation is a special grace from God. To have some of the children receive this call is the greatest glory the family can know. Parents, therefore, have the duty and responsibility of helping the growth of vocations.

Every year, on Vocation Day, we call your attention to the work of promoting vocations. This is the duty of all Catholics. In our families, in our daily lives, our work and parishes, organizations and schools, we have the duty and the opportunity of carrying out this work. The first means is to live the life of the Gospels. Then we can find various other means - for example, prayers or other suitable methods to cultivate the seedling of vocation, so that it may bear strong and ripe fruit. In this way, we can spread the kingdom of Christ.

Let us work hard and pray the Lord sincerely to send workers to harvest his fields.

+ Bishop Peter Lei
Bishop of Hong Kong
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