



## The Virgin of Lujan, Mother of Vocations to the IVE

This coming May 8<sup>th</sup>, the Church throughout the world will celebrate the *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, which will happily coincide with the beautiful feast of our Most Holy Mother, the Virgin of Lujan as well as the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our offering of the golden rose “as a perpetual testimony of our love and gratitude for the vocations which she has sent to our Religious Family...and as a vow of confidence for the many more which we hope to bring forth through her intercession”<sup>1</sup>. How much we have to thank the Virgin for!

Since the last General Chapter (July of 2016) until today our small Institute has given to the Church 103 priests for the greater glory of God. This is a very great grace for the Institute. In order to measure the blessing which this signifies, we can call to mind that there are very important dioceses that have not had or have had very few priestly ordinations in the last 10 or 20 years, which also unfortunately happens with religious congregations of great prestige and tradition.

On the other hand, today we have 503 vocations in formation<sup>2</sup> and of which only 16% are Argentinian while the other 84% come from other countries<sup>3</sup>, which speaks of the fecundity with which God has been pleased to crown the efforts of evangelization of our missionaries throughout the world so that the message of Christ can arrive most effectively to the heart of each culture.

Let us likewise consider that it is not just a simple detail that the Virgin of Lujan has sent vocations to the Institute that come from the same family. The double family ties-by blood and spirit-not only contribute to the unity and cohesion of the Institute, but it is also an important apostolic witness for other families and, in fact, for all other Christians.

Therefore, in order to celebrate the *World Day of Prayer for Vocations* this coming 8<sup>th</sup> of May within the framework of the Solemnity of the Purest Conception of Lujan, within these lines we would like to speak about the primary commitment of each member of the Institute to promote vocations and about one of the means of promoting vocations, which is precisely “family ministry, which is in itself vocational”<sup>4</sup>.

### 1. Primary Commitment

“Because Christ is one, we want to work with all our strength.... That all men may confess the adorable Name of the Lord Jesus, fulfilling his commandment: *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation*”<sup>5</sup>.

Without enough *workers for the harvest*, it will not be possible to make real the command of Christ-*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation*<sup>7</sup>- which is the very reason for the existence

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<sup>1</sup> P. GUSTAVO NIETO, IVE, *Speech at the presentation of the golden rose* (8/5/2017).

<sup>2</sup> Among brothers of temporary vows, deacons, major seminarians, minor seminarians, postulants and novices.

<sup>3</sup> 45 countries in 5 continents.

<sup>4</sup> *Directory of Vocations*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> Mk 16:15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Directory of Spirituality*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Mk 16:15.



and mission of the Institute in history, nor will the Eucharistic sacrifice be able to be renewed daily-*Do this in in remembrance of me*<sup>8</sup>- “because without the priest there can be no eucharistic offering”<sup>9</sup>.

At the same time, it is well known that every vocation is a gift from God and, like all gifts that come from God, they arrive through many human mediations: parents, teachers, pastors, a good catholic friend, etc. But certainly, the first who should be involved in vocation ministry are those called to the ministerial priesthood themselves. And if this is true for all priests, it is doubly true for the members of the Institute since “knowing how to call, teach, direct, accompany and select vocations-priestly, diaconal, religious, missionary and secular-is an integral part of our spirituality”<sup>10</sup>, a task which no member of the Institute can avoid. And what’s more, “The pastoral care of vocations is intrinsic to the goal of the evangelization of culture and to the charism of the Institute, since the evangelical counsels are an integral part of the message of salvation and, those who follow them especially manifest the ‘eschatological nature of the Church’<sup>11</sup>, being the adornment of the Bride of Christ”<sup>12</sup>.

So far there is nothing new. We know this. However, it is easy to become lethargic or to give priority to another type of pastoral work - perhaps of more immediate fruit - than to vocation ministry.

How can we promote priestly and religious vocations? We know very well that at the foundation of all vocational work, as Our Lord Jesus Christ taught, is found authentic and persevering prayer, asking for more workers for the harvest<sup>13</sup>; nevertheless, our Proper Law explicitly points out to us a necessary and consequent means: “through the faithful and joyful witness of consecrated life”<sup>14</sup>. This is what St. Paul expresses when he says: *I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called*<sup>15</sup>. “Conduct that responds to a vocation,” says St. John Paul II, “gives rise to new vocations. This coherent conduct is like the permanent basis of prayer; it prepares it, and prayer is like its development; reciprocally, prayer continually calls for such behavior”<sup>16</sup>. For this reason, before the other hundred projects that we could carry out in view of vocational ministry, the first, together with prayer, is that of *priestly and religious testimony*. We cannot ignore the fact that our life is always a significant presence at the side of young people: it encourages or discourages, it awakens the desire for God or constitutes an obstacle to following him. Hence, consistent and joyful witness is the first vocational proposal within the reach of any of our members.

If we really give a *joyful testimony* in serving Christ “carrying out our apostolates with competence and generosity”<sup>17</sup>, if we are able to radiate hope because of the faith that dwells in our heart despite of all the fatigue of the struggle, if we truly give ourselves to souls without failing in prayer, how can we doubt that vocations will spring up around us? The vocations which God has sent us through Our Lady of Lujan from Christian minority countries such as Tajikistan, the Gaza Strip, Egypt; from places where the Institute has very little presence, as in Papua New

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor 11:25.

<sup>9</sup> *Constitutions*, 204; *op. cit. Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Directory of Spirituality*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Directory of Vocations*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mt 9:37-28.

<sup>14</sup> *Directory of the Evangelization of Culture*, 196.

<sup>15</sup> Eph 4:1.

<sup>16</sup> *To priests and consecrated persons in Beauraing, Belgium* (18/5/1985).

<sup>17</sup> *Directory of the Evangelization of Culture*, 196.



Guinea, or none at all, as in Sri Lanka, India, Guatemala, Slovakia, etc., prove that prayer united to a coherent life always produces fruit wherever God wants and how God wants.

However, none of us is unaware, no matter how few years of religious life we may have, that missionaries are lacking in the suburbs of the big cities, in the rural areas, among the inhabitants of the high mountain areas and in the immensity of the jungle. There is a lack of priests who are dedicated to the youth, to families, to the elderly and sick, to workers, to the intellectuals, to the professionals and the ignorant, to the artists, to the rich and the poor, to citizens of our country or immigrants... it is our experience that there is an urgent need for a greater number of priests and religious in parishes, in parish groups, in schools and universities, in factories, and in so many other fields...until we can say “that the ends of the earth, to which the Gospel must reach, are getting farther and farther away”<sup>18</sup>.

This lack of workers for the harvest was already a challenge for Jesus Himself in Gospel times. His example allows us to understand that the too small number of consecrated persons is a situation inherent to the condition of the Church and the world, and not just an accidental fact due to current circumstances. However, the Incarnate Word, having compassion on the multitudes, offered them his teaching because he saw that they *were like sheep without a shepherd*<sup>19</sup>, but He also wanted that His disciples participate in the solution, inviting them before anything to pray<sup>20</sup>. We also can and must influence the number of vocations by prayer.

Sometimes when we say that we must pray for vocations we often believe that this is a general intention, however, we consider that it would be convenient to pray frequently and explicitly for vocations, especially for our Institute. It is not of less importance to invite others to pray-as they are in fact doing in various places through the “40 Hours Project” or the “Thursdays of the priest” or the “rosary for vocations”-because we must be aware that vocations cannot take the next step with their own strength, and for this reason, they must be stimulated by prayer, accompanied and supported by the understanding that vocation is a true gift from heaven. We emphasize here the predominate role that the contemplatives of the Institute have, since the abundance and quality of priestly, contemplative, missionary and consecrated vocations for the Institute depend to no lesser degree on their generous and joyful fidelity to the contemplative life. It is moving to think that our Lord wanted to associate to the joined hands of a monk and to his silent immolation the precious gift of vocations for His Church.

In addition, it is almost obvious that vocation ministry requires closeness to young people, since without it one cannot give testimony to the consecrated life. Many of them are looking for the meaning of their lives. Therefore we must be generous in inviting them to collaborate in our pastoral activities: to participate in our Masses and the feasts of the Institute, to help in the homes of mercy, go as a volunteer to the different missions of the Institute, participate in popular missions, help in the organization of the Spiritual Exercises, oratories or any kind of apostolic activity, invite them to be catechists, to participate in the Voices of the Word, to consecrate them to Jesus through Mary, to do the Spiritual Exercises themselves, invite them to camps, etc. Our Institute, by the grace of God, has an infinite number of opportunities and a great variety of activities to involve others in the cause of Christ, and to a great extent it depends on us how much room we give them.

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<sup>18</sup> *Directory of Missions Ad Gentes*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mk 6:34.

<sup>20</sup> St. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis on Consecrated Life* (19/10/1994).



It is and has always been an option in our Institute to invite the youth to share in our religious life taking the measures required in each case. Did not Christ say to Andrew and John: *come and see*<sup>21</sup>? It is important to understand that vocation ministry cannot be limited to occasional and extraordinary initiatives-such as the *Come and See* or the *Open House* that are organized by the houses of formation- but should be one of the constant pastoral concerns of each of the priests of the Institute. We can always - unless the superior decides otherwise - open the doors of our houses to young people, invite them to eat pizza on Fridays with the other members of the community, to go on an outing or a pilgrimage. In short, there are countless occasions.

Far be it from us to be tempted to say “I’m not up to that anymore”, “there are already those in the seminary who do apostolate with the youth”, “it’s not my job because I’m in a house of mercy”, “I’m a contemplative”, “the young people here are interested in other things”, “I’m alone in my parish” or some similar excuse. To those who think like this, we reply with what St. John Paul II said to contemplatives, but consider it also applicable to apostolics: “Young people today are animated by great ideals and, if they see coherent men and women, witnesses to the Gospel, they follow them with enthusiasm. Proposing to today’s world to practice the life hidden in Christ means reaffirming the value of humility, poverty and interior freedom. The world, which is thirsty for these virtues, wants to see upright men who practice them with daily heroism, moved by the awareness of loving and serving their brothers and sisters with this witness”<sup>22</sup>. And this is the responsibility of everyone. Moreover, at some point God brings us all into contact with a young man of solid personality to whom we can explicitly propose the consideration of a priestly vocation. How many of us have entered the Institute because a priest had the courage and insight to enthusiastically propose our vocation to us? We should not be pessimists, resigned or too timid to speak about vocations. This was not the example that we received. Undoubtedly the seed of a vocation is in the heart of many youth and is simply waiting for the favorable occasion to blossom. Our Proper Law says: “To seek vocations is also to propose them: ‘with passion and discretion’<sup>23</sup>”<sup>24</sup>.

Notice also that our Proper Law affirms that in vocational ministry “the best energies must be invested”<sup>25</sup>. And when we say *best energies*, we refer to the quality of the time which we dedicate to this ministry, it is essential to be available to young people; to the generosity with which we employ all means - including financial - to seek, support and accompany vocations; to the dedication to study and personal preparation to provide a good formation for young people, in order that we ourselves may know how to discern, etc. Everyone, and especially pastors, must consider vocational ministry as an obligatory dimension of the overall pastoral plan. “In pastoral action *we must never forget* that educating in the faith also means developing the vocational dynamism proper to the Christian life. To be a Christian is, in itself, a vocation, a call: the highest and strongest vocation and the basis of all the specific following within the ecclesial community”<sup>26</sup>. For this reason, the *Directory of Parishes* says: “Remember that vocations will be the sign of a parish’s maturity<sup>27</sup>, and that vocational work must become a pastoral priority, knowing how to foster them with generosity and letting go of them when they decide to follow Jesus Christ more closely”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Jn 1:39.

<sup>22</sup> *To the Carthusians in Serra San Bruno, Italy* (5/10/1984).

<sup>23</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Weekly Meeting with Pilgrims* (16/3/1983); OR (27/3/1983), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Directory of Vocations*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> *Directory of the Evangelization of Culture*, 196.

<sup>26</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Message to the participants of the 1st Latin American Congress on Vocations* (2/2/1994).

<sup>27</sup> *Directory of Vocations*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> *Directory of Parishes*, 104.



In this regard, it seems necessary to us to make special mention of the parish, which always plays a decisive role with regard to priestly and religious vocations. The parish is where the youth concretely live their Christian experience, hear the message of Christ and enter the life of grace, it is also in the parish where they enter in to contact with our priests, brothers, sisters, and seminarians, including on occasion with our monks. In this regard, the importance of the witness and good example of each one of them is evident, as a normal instrument of God's call to a more generous service.

It is imperative to “reactivate an intense pastoral action that, starting from the Christian vocation in general, from an enthusiastic youth ministry, gives the Church the servants it needs”<sup>29</sup>. In addition to the means already mentioned, in our Institute we have the valuable resource of the *festive oratory*, which should not be lacking in any parish of the IVE. For “the oratory is a budding source of vocations”<sup>30</sup> and most likely “the only form of complete Christian education accessible to large masses of young people”<sup>31</sup>.

Another element of great importance in the promotion of vocations is the *testimony of community life*. Experience has shown us that it is often the example of a religious or a priest that contributes decisively to the realization of a priestly vocation or that to the consecrated life. Similarly, the communal witness of fidelity and joy is an enormous attraction to religious life and is definitely a source of new vocations and a support for perseverance<sup>32</sup>. In other words, “religious communities can only attract young people through a collective witness of authentic consecration, lived in the joy of personal dedication to Christ and to their brothers and sisters”<sup>33</sup>. How many times have youth approached us simply because of this testimony of joy, because they have seen us give ourselves generously to apostolic work in the missions *ad gentes*, or simply because they met us on a mountain hike or in another community outing. Hence why it is still very important to cultivate joy in the religious community<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, we must emphasize the importance of family ministry as one of the means to promote vocations. This is pointed out by in our Proper Law in several of its documents and it is what we are going to deal with in the second point.

## 2. Family ministry is in itself vocational

Quoting St. John Paul II, the *Directory of the Third Order* says: “The family, the domestic Church, is the first field where God cultivates vocations. For this reason, it is necessary to understand that a correct and careful family ministry is, by itself, vocational ministry”<sup>35</sup>. In fact, “From the very beginning of our Institutes, God wanted to bless us with numerous families with a healthy human and Christian formation, from which many vocations to the consecrated life or to the priesthood have sprung”<sup>36</sup>. And while this has been true from the beginning, we have all seen this in the recent priestly ordinations. Therefore, a careful dedication to family ministry, and particularly to

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<sup>29</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the III General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate*, IV, 1b (January 28, 1979).

<sup>30</sup> *Directory of the Oratory*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Directory of Fraternal Life*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis on Consecrated Life* (19/10/1994).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Directory of Fraternal Life*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> 376; *op. cit.* Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 55. Cf. ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXX World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (26/12/1993).

<sup>36</sup> *Directory of the Third Order*, 376.



the Third Order, ensures the life of our Religious Family by preparing the ground and hearts for the call of the Incarnate Word<sup>37</sup>.

The family is one of the turning points of culture<sup>38</sup> and, therefore, the pastoral care of the family concerns us all, not only those in charge of the Third Order, not only the pastor, not only the priest, not only the specialists<sup>39</sup>, but everyone, because we are all members of this Institute whose primary charism is to “prolong Christ in families”<sup>40</sup>.

Having said this, let us now turn to the close relationship that exists between families and the priestly and religious vocation.

The Spiritual Father of our Religious Family wrote the following in a message for the World Day of Prayer for vocations, “The family, to the extent to which it becomes conscious of this singular vocation [apostolic vocation through the sacrament of matrimony] and measures up to it, becomes a community of sanctification in which one learns to live meekness, justice, mercy, chastity, peace, purity of heart (cf. Eph 4:1-4; *Familiaris consortio*, n. 21). It becomes, in other words, what Saint John Chrysostom called ‘the domestic church’, that is, a place in which Jesus Christ lives and works for the salvation of men and for the growth of the kingdom of God”<sup>41</sup>.

To help make this happen, and in order that families are truly aided and instructed in the accomplishment of their own duties and that the Christian life is fostered within them, pastoral ministry is necessary. For this reason, among the many different means and opportunities that God offers us to do this apostolate, the Proper Law exhorts us to *visit families* as an occasion to participate in family concerns, to pour upon them the superabundance of Christ through the timely word and to correct them paternally if they deviate from good conduct<sup>42</sup>. It must be recognized that many times God has made use of this contact on our part with families in order to call many priestly and religious vocations. In fact, more than a few members of the Institute themselves considered a vocation or simply approached the Religious Family because of these visits to the families-families from the parish, the Third Order, children from catechism, students from school, those of our benefactors, the youth of the oratory, etc.-. Visits to families continue to be an ever-present apostolate in our Institute that should not be neglected.

“The task of Christian parents”, continues St. John Paul II, “is as important as it is sensitive, because they are called to *prepare, cultivate and protect* the vocations which God stirs up in their family. They must, therefore, enrich themselves and their family with spiritual and moral values”<sup>43</sup>. But if there is no one to dedicate themselves to them, no one to teach them, no one to remind them, how do we expect that tomorrow the vocations that may arise in this family will not be stifled? And do we dare be surprised and even complain if families allow themselves to be dragged into consumerism, hedonism or secularism that disturb and prevent the realization of God’s plan if we do not encourage them to do otherwise? If we do not form the parents in generosity toward God when He calls one of their children and even to ask on behalf of the Church the inestimable gift of a vocation for their children, how can we be surprised if vocations do not arise from our parishes, missions, and jurisdictions? It was with great sorrow that John Paul the Great wrote: “How can children, rendered morally orphans, without educators and

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Directory of the Evangelization of Culture*, 243.

<sup>40</sup> *Constitutions*, 31.

<sup>41</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXXI World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (24/4/1994).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Directory of Parishes*, 106.

<sup>43</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXXI World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (24/4/1994).



without models, grow in their esteem for human and Christian values? How can those seeds of vocations, which the Holy Spirit continues to put into the hearts of the young generations, develop in such a climate?<sup>44</sup> St. Manuel Gonzalez said: “It is not that there is a lack of vocations, but that there is a lack of Christian homes, which are the furnaces that give warmth, atmosphere and life to the vocations that God gives”<sup>45</sup>. It is necessary to be aware that families are the privileged place for an authentic vocational growth.

It is for this reason that we say, “Pastoral work for vocations finds its *first and natural* place in the family. Parents, in fact, must know how to accept as a grace the gift that God gives them in calling one of their children to the priesthood or to the consecrated life. Such a grace is asked for in prayer, and it is positively accepted when children are educated to understand the richness and joy of consecrating themselves to God”<sup>46</sup>. This requires the formation of families in the knowledge of this important aspect of their mission, which makes necessary a pastoral care aimed at helping spouses to know that they are cooperators in the mission of the Church, creating a family climate of faith, charity and prayer that orients the children to be available and to accept God’s plan for each one’s life. In this sense, it is important for us to be familiar with family problems in order to instruct spouses in their specific responsibilities through the proclamation of the Word of God, so that, well formed in the faith, they may know how to accompany their children, possibly called, to give themselves unreservedly to God. In fact, it is through the apostolate which we do with families that many children have found the support of their parents in order to realize their vocation.

“Parents who welcome the call of a son or daughter to a special consecration for the kingdom of heaven with a sense of gratitude and joy... discover with amazement that the gift of their love is, as it were, multiplied, thanks to the sacred vocation of their children, beyond the limited dimensions of human love”<sup>47</sup>. How many times has it happened to us that the parents of other religious have received us as if we were their own children, how many times have they themselves told us that with the entrance of their son to the seminary or their daughter to the convent that “their family has grown” ...and how beautiful that this is so! From this also follows the important duty of gratitude and exquisite charity that we owe not only to our parents but also to the parents of other religious, especially to those who do not see their children as often, who are older, who are going through various hardships and who belong to our parishes, our jurisdictions, etc.

### **3. Mother of the Lord and our Mother**

An example that illustrates the priestly attitude in vocation ministry is given to us by St. Luigi Orione. He himself puts it in writing in a letter he wrote from Tortona to a married couple, friends and benefactors of his, during the vigil of the liturgical feast of the Assumption in 1927. He writes about this Marian feast with great tenderness and subtlety:

“Just thinking of Our Lady, the sweet Mother of God and ours, calms the spirit, the mind is serene, speaking of Our Lady spreads joy, it is like a wave of the softest spiritual peace and

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> *Collected works*, What a Priest can do Today, [1833].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> St. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXXI World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (24/4/1994).



invoking her restores my courage and gives me life, the highest life!”<sup>48</sup>. Then he adds with great insight: “*Blessed are the parents who offer their children into the hands of the Mother of the Lord*”<sup>49</sup>.

The Saint continues to give announcements concerning new vocations of religious and future priests: “Tomorrow morning, at 5:30, I will sing the Holy Mass in the humble little house of St. Bernard and afterwards I will give the habit of the Perpetual Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament to four blind women who have been with us for years.

I will then leave to Villa Moffa near Bra, in order to give the religious habit to some youth tomorrow in the afternoon.

In a few months, Reg. Adriano Callegari will enter. The hand of God will make a good fabric out of him”<sup>50</sup>.

He then naturally and boldly asks the question: “And you, will you not give me one of your children? I will not keep him for myself, I will give him straight away to the Virgin, and he will be the consolation, glory, and blessing for your family”<sup>51</sup>.

Devotion entrusted to Our Lady, the promotion of vocations and the courage to propose it, things of which St. Luigi Orione gives us the example, should be corollaries of our vocational ministry.

The tender and trusting devotion to the Most Holy Virgin is truly a stronghold and incentive in our priestly ministry especially when it comes to attracting vocations. And it has been this way since the beginnings. Our Founder would say: “I am convinced and I attribute to the intercession of the Virgin of Lujan the vocations that God gives us”.

Regarding the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in awaking, drawing, accompanying, and sustaining the vocations of special consecration I would like to point out a few elements.

For being “essentially missionary and Marian”<sup>52</sup> and for our particular way of living our consecration to Christ through our consecration of slavery to Mary Most Holy, Our Institute has a special quality in its devotion to the Virgin which conquers many souls. Many of our religious became interested in the Institute precisely because of our profound Marian devotion, others the Virgin herself brought to us on the occasion of some Marian feast or during a visit to a Marian shrine, while others came to us through participation in groups of consecration to the Virgin, etc. By this we mean that the Marian imprint with which we must live and carry out our apostolate is undoubtedly something that we cannot fail to take into account when it comes to vocation ministry. The maternal presence of Mary should be present in the awakening and guiding of the vocations which God has destined for our Institute.

We read in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “It is in the contemplation of the Crucified Christ that all vocations find their inspiration; From this contemplation...all gifts, and in particular the gift of the consecrated life, take their origin”<sup>53</sup>. However, the Mother is at the foot

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<sup>48</sup> SAINT LOUIS ORIONE, *As a true friend - Letters written in confidence*, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> *Constitutions*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> 23.



of the Cross. It is she who points out to souls the shortest and easiest way to give oneself to Christ. For this reason, all vocational apostolate is also essentially Marian.

On the other hand, the recourse entrusted in prayer to the Mother of God, who reserves nothing for herself and takes care of us with great concern, will always provide for the needs of the family and will send abundant vocations to our Institute in a timely manner, as in fact she has already been doing, if we remain intimately united with her. Moreover, if in our priestly ministry, after having guided a vocation towards God, we desire it to persevere, St. Alphonsus Liguori recommends: “Let there be an irrevocable daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy”<sup>54</sup>.

If at the same time these vocations are faithfully Marian, the Virgin will make of them “great saints...for it is only that singular and miraculous Virgin who can produce, in union with the Holy Ghost, singular and extraordinary things”<sup>55</sup>.

Finally, if devotion to Our Lady is “energetically” promoted among Christian families, defined as the first seminary and irreplaceable reservoir of vocations<sup>56</sup>, it will favor the acceptance of the Lord’s call among their sons and daughters, their generous response and their joyful perseverance and, on the part of their parents, a generous acceptance of God’s will.

We are convinced that the ever-increasing number of vocations which God has been pleased to bestow on us in these last years are a special proof of the maternal and ever solicitous presence of the Virgin of Lujan in the history of the Institute. And to her we must always cling.

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Before concluding, a word of sincere appreciation to all the parents - living and deceased - of our religious for their generous dedication and unparalleled contribution to the cause of Christ. As St. John Paul II said: “The cultivation of the missionary vocation in their sons and daughters will be on the part of the parents the best collaboration to the divine call”<sup>57</sup>. “Always be spiritually proud that the Lord has called one of your family to follow Him closely. But continue to accompany your family member every day with prayer, so that their commitment to consecration may always be persevering and fervent”<sup>58</sup>. Know that the support you give us through prayer, understanding, help and love is of incalculable worth for our missionaries.

To conclude, we would like to include an excerpt from the book *A Pastoral Dream* by St. Manuel Gonzalez regarding the topic we have been discussing. The saint says:

“Ordinarily when one speaks of this point [vocations], all eyes are fixed on the parish priest and it is agreed by all how much he can foster vocations by his constant vigilance and zealous work of selection, education and preservation of those who can be or are already seminarians.

This is certainly true. But it is no less true that the secret of the efficacy of the parish priest’s action should not be a secret that belongs exclusively to him, but to *all* priests.

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<sup>54</sup> *Directory of Vocations*, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. SAINT LOUIS MARIE GRIGNION DE MONTFORT, *True Devotion to Mary*, [35].

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *To the future missionaries at Javier* (6/11/1982).

<sup>58</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *To priests and consecrated persons in Prato, Italy* (19/3/1986).



Observe in general the conditions of these parish priests, sure hunters and promoters of vocations. You can summarize them all in this: *he is a priest who is aware of his dignity. A worthy priest.* Therein lies the secret.

He may not be an eloquent speaker, nor a brilliant writer, nor possess a first-rate intelligence, nor be a prodigy of extraordinary things. It does not matter. It will be enough for him to live and present himself to his people as a true priest. Gentle and affable in his dealings with others. Respectful with those above him without vileness. Approachable to those below him without being ingratiating. Always found when sought in his church, at the bedside of his sick, in the children's school or in his home, and never in the casino, nor in the taverns, nor in the gatherings of the powerful or the idle. Giving without wasting. Studious and fond of learning without smugness as well as conducive to teaching without emulations of envy. Unmovable as a rock with tyrants. Soft as wax toward the one who commands him in the name of God or who asks him for charity. A child with children. Sick with the sick. Weak with the weak. Joyful with those who laugh and sad with those who cry. And, in short, *made everything for everyone*, to win everyone for Jesus Christ. This is the secret, and if I may say so, the great secret of attraction to the priesthood.

Put a priest anywhere, whether he is a parish priest or not, who conducts himself with this awareness of his dignity, and I pledge you my word, and neither God nor logic will fail me, that it will not be long before sprouts are born around this tree.

*A dignified clergy is the best and most effective occupant of a seminary. A clergy that has been secularized and forgotten his dignity is condemned by God, by logic and by moral sense, to the most disgraceful sterility. Harsh is the punishment indeed, but as inevitable and just as it is harsh*<sup>59</sup>.

To the Pure and Immaculate Conception of Lujan our most sincere gratitude for each and every one of the vocations that she has sent to the Institute. May she, Virgin Mother of the Incarnate Word, help us to “discover and to orient so many vocations that we would fill all the good seminaries and novitiates in the entire world”<sup>60</sup>; that the youth who come into contact with us, attracted by the beauty and gentleness of this Most Holy Mother may be docile to the call of Christ; and that the parents of families, contemplating and imitating the assiduous prayer of the Holy Family may be sure guides for their children toward spiritual and eternal goods.

Grant us, Holy Virgin of Lujan, Mother of vocations<sup>61</sup>, to be able to also see in our days the wonders of the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit who calls a multitude of souls in order to make them into witnesses of the Beatitudes.

Our Lady of Lujan, you are now and always all our hope.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. SAINT MANUEL GONZALEZ, *A Pastoral Dream*, [1971-1974].

<sup>60</sup> *Directory of Spirituality*, 290.

<sup>61</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the XXIX World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (10/5/1992).