



Miserando atque eligendo
Pastoral Care of Vocations

Greeting
His Eminence Beniamino Cardinal Stella

Wednesday, 19 October, 4:00 p.m.

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Priests,
Brothers and sisters,

A few days ago the Pope's decision to dedicate the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will take place on October 2018, to a topical subject of great importance: "*Young people, faith and vocational discernment*", was made public

The goal of the synodal meeting – as affirmed by the bulletin of the Sala Stampa of the Holy See – is to "*accompany young people along their existential journey towards maturity so that, through a process of discernment, they can discover their life plan and achieve it joyfully, opening themselves up to an encounter with God and humanity and actively taking part in the building of the Church and society.*"

I find that, in these words, there is a perfect synthesis of that which we call Pastoral Work for Vocations, a field of vital importance in which each one of you, through diverse titles and specific functions, offer your own service: to accompany, listen, and support young men along their interior maturation and, above all, to help them in their discernment of God's project for their life.

Thus, while they are invested in the search of their own vocation, young men will be able to enter into contact with God and to discern in which way the Lord is asking them to be "living stones" of His Church, discovering that the path of the ordained priesthood also represents a path of beauty and joy for human life.

It is so urgent to recuperate the awareness of the importance of this task that the Congregation for Clergy has thought to promote this Congress, the reason for which you have all come from different parts of the world, to reflect, together, and to begin a fraternal sharing of human, spiritual, and pastoral experiences.



Illustrious guests who have so graciously accepted the invitation on behalf of the Dicastery will help us to enter into the topic and to ask ourselves the right questions for shared reflection. On my behalf, I pray that this initiative does not remain isolated and occasional and hence without the due pastoral follow-up.

Celebrating the Eucharist at Santa Marta a few days ago, Pope Francis reminded us how having been chosen and loved by God is the foundation of our human and spiritual life: *“the Christian, therefore, is a chosen person...Think of a couple, when expecting a baby: How will it be? And how will he or she smile? And talk? But I dare say that we, each of us, has been dreamed of by the Father, just as a father and mother dreams of their awaited baby. And this gives you great security. The Father wanted you, not the mass of people, no, you. Each of us. And the foundation, is the basis of our relationship with God. We speak of a Father who loves us, who chose us, who gave us a name.”* (Pope Francis, Homily at Santa Marta, 13 October 2016)

Therefore, the pastoral work for vocations *“is not a secondary or marginal matter, or the business of one group only, as if it were but a “part,” no matter how important, of the entire pastoral work of the Church”* (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 34), instead, it is the soul of the ecclesial mission: vocation, in fact, is connatural to being Christian and to being Church, because at the origin of everything there is the gaze of God which has hovered over my life and has called me.

We have deemed it important, therefore, to take up, once again, the motto of the Holy Father, an evangelical excerpt from the vocation of Levi, as the title of this Congress: ***Miserando atque eligendo***. This loving and merciful gaze of the Lord that hovers over us and chooses us is the foundation of our life and of our happiness.

Jesus walks by, looks with love, and calls man to follow. It is in the mystery of this calling, in the gaze which does not judge but which looks within and heals us, in the adventure of walking over his footsteps, that every man can discover the project that God personally entrusts to him.

As shepherds of the People of God, we cannot remain indifferent to this gospel dynamic: we are anointed and sent forth, not to administer the sacred or to organize or direct a structure, but, instead, to “walk” in the midst of our brothers, to look at them profoundly so as to allow them to be encountered by the gaze of God, to accompany them in the journey by listening to their questions and to gather their desires, so that they may be able to discover the hidden treasure that lies within them, which is none other than their vocation.

Our efforts, especially in accompanying young men, must be characterized by a creative pedagogical and spiritual capacity. Through this we manage to tear down what distances us from the sensibilities of the younger generations and, offering them a loving ear and a compassionate understanding, accompany them, dialog with them, and awaken in them healthy questions regarding the mystery of life. In such a way we help them to seek the Lord and to follow Him, which, for many, means leaving everything behind!

Pope Francis has offered us a precise “identity kit” of this art of personal accompaniment in the processes of growth, by exhorting the entire Church to fulfill this vocational task, from the moment that, says the Holy Father, *“In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate*



gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 169)

The Holy Father emphasizes that this experience of encounter helps people to know their own stories better and to orient themselves in the future, starting from contact with God, towards Whom we must lead them by an exercise of listening, discernment, and docility to the Holy Spirit.

It is here that we discover just how much our pastoral mission is “*destined to care for the birth, discernment and fostering of vocations, particularly those to the priesthood. By the very fact that “the lack of priests is certainly a sad thing for any Church,” pastoral work for vocations needs especially today, to be taken up with a new vigor and more decisive commitment by all the members of the Church.*” (John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 34)

It is this effort to animate, propose, and promote vocations, in a particular way, that of the ordained priesthood, which we call the pastoral work for vocations. This vocations work, which refers to the real history of individual persons and to the cultural and ecclesiastical context in which it is carried out, cannot be driven through abstract programs or pre-manufactured decisions, but rather, it needs to be done by people who become experts in “recognizing the mystery of the other’s life” and who know how to guide him, with “patience and understanding”, towards an encounter with himself and with the Gospel of Christ (cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 172)

Pastors and pastoral workers, this is why we are gathered here today, precisely to grow in the mission which has been entrusted to us: we need new stimuli, to embrace the novelty that the Spirit suggests to us, to question ourselves regarding the methods and the language we use in our work for vocations and to learn, perhaps, how to better favor the encounter between young men and God, showing them that it is worthwhile following the Lord, even on the path of ordained ministry.

While I offer you my warm welcome and I thank each member of this great crowd for your presence, I pray that this initiative may represent, for you, a precious occasion for prayer, of gratitude to God for the gift of our vocations, of reflection and of encounter, which can enrich us and offer us important instruments to continue, with renewed motivation, our vocational mission in your respective dioceses.