

Dear Sisters and Companions in Mission,

It is perhaps with subtle providence that I write to you today on the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, about the **51st World Day of Prayer for Vocations (11 May 2014)**. I bring to mind the various ways in which God called Joseph: as a righteous man from the House of David; as a carpenter of humble means; a husband to Mary; and adoptive father to Jesus. That he experienced a life of hard work and toil, not just for himself, but ultimately for the provision of his family and good for his community should not be overlooked.

Pope Francis has set the theme for 2014, being ***Vocations, Witness to the Truth***. Immediately begs the question: what is the truth? There are two forms in which the word 'truth' is commonly used. The first belongs to a standard, an ideal, as in: what are the truths we stand for, individually and as a community?

I invite you with the following prompts, to prayerfully consider this question.

As a matter of honour, one owes it to another to manifest the truth. - St Thomas Aquinas

I am the way, the truth and the life. - John 14:6

You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. - John 18:37

How in my life do I manifest the truth? For whom do I speak, do I speak for the voiceless, the oppressed, and the imprisoned? Where there are lies and false-telling, do I work toward the restoration of the truth? Whose 'truth' do I belong to; that which is from God or from darkness?

Yet there is much more to the truth than professing it. We need to actualise it and make it real, lest it remain a lofty ideal in the minds of ancient philosophers. Pope Francis' *Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations* (15 January 2014) demonstrates the second way we can understand 'truth'.

In his opening paragraph, Francis witnesses to the truth by first acknowledging what is the reality: that the Church is in need of vocations. Citing the gospel, he inserts the words Jesus spoke to his disciples, "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." (Mt 9:35-38) But often asked is the question, "where are the people?" The truth is that the multitude of (potential) labourers is around us. Every life we encounter, through grace, is a life called toward God. As St Ignatius reminds us in Annotation #23, our purpose in life is to serve and praise God. This takes shape through our responses of love, which we come to through the choosing of what is good, the better, *magis*. If by our creation and being, we are called to God, if our purpose in this world is in essence, godly, then it leads to the suggestion that what we ought to foster is a healthy environment for this.

We do this by being people of the gospel and of joy. St John Paul II's famous words ring out: we are the Easter people and 'hallelujah' is our song! Pope Francis knows and lives this well, "the true joy of those who are called consists in believing and experiencing that he, the Lord, is faithful, and that with him we can walk, be disciples and witnesses of God's love, open our hearts to great ideals, to great things." (WDPV, n.4) Through our engagement and presence in the world, which beckons us to grow as it changes, we are to accompany others, for in this is the value of community and shared responsibility. "A vocation is a fruit that ripens in a well cultivated field of mutual love that becomes mutual service, in the context of an authentic ecclesial life. No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love." (WDPV, n.3) Marie Madeleine knew this well and lived it by her desire

and efforts to make known and loved the name of Jesus; the same holy name after which her Society is called and dedicated.

But how do we continue to make Jesus known? In his practical nature, Pope Francis addresses this, pointing blank: I ask you bishops, priests, religious, Christian communities and families [he calls on *all the faithful*, not just priests and religious] to orient vocational pastoral planning in this direction, by accompanying young people on pathways of holiness which, because they are personal, “call for a genuine ‘training in holiness’ capable of being adapted to every person’s need. (WDPV, n.4)

Witnessing to the truth also means that we will encounter opposition to the truth. This can occur in the subtlest of places as well as in our headlines. Thus we need to maintain our ongoing learning and formation so we have the tools to speak up and speak out against the false ideas and policies that strangle the ways of faith, compassion and love. We also need to engage in dialogue (which means listening before speaking) on issues that impact on our collective socialness.

I recently heard the Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, Most Rev Vincent Long OFMConv say in a homily:

We [the Australian Church] have lost much ground, numerically, financially and worst of all, morally. [But] I like to think of this critical juncture as the new exile. I like to think of us not simply as the ground troops for the church militant, but prophets like in the exile. Prophets who accompany their people and point us to the sign of the new kairos, and lead them in the direction of the kingdom. (Given at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Deepdene, 26 April 2014)

And in the tradition that is so familiar to us: may we be courageous and confident men and women of the gospel. On the 51st World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we pray in a special way for all who work and witness to the truth in the service of others, for God. We pray for our political and national leaders, and for all in positions of authority, that the power they hold be used responsibly, humbly and always for the greater good.

I conclude with a poem by Michael Leunig:

In order to be truthful
We must do more than speak the truth.
We must also hear truth.
We must also receive truth.
We must also search for truth.
The difficult truth.
Within us and around us.
We must devote ourselves to truth.
Otherwise we are dishonest
And our lives are mistaken.
God grant us the strength and the courage
To be truthful.
Amen.

Yours in companionship, and in ongoing gratitude for the opportunity to work in such a blessed space,

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