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| **MESSAGE FOR WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS: "THE GIFT OF THE LOVE OF GOD"**  Vatican City, 13 February 2012 (VIS) - The Pope's Message for the forth-ninth World Day of Prayer for Vocations was made public today. The Day is due to be celebrated on 29 April, fourth Sunday of Easter, and the theme of Benedict XVI's reflections this year is: "Vocations, the Gift of the Love of God". Ample extracts of the English-language version of the document are given below:  'The source of every perfect gift is God who is Love – Deus caritas est: 'Whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him'. Sacred Scripture tells the story of this original bond between God and man, which precedes creation itself. ... We are loved by God even 'before' we come into existence! Moved solely by His unconditional love, He created us 'not out of existing things', to bring us into full communion with Him".  "The profound truth of our existence is thus contained in this surprising mystery: every creature, and in particular every human person, is the fruit of God’s thought and an act of His love, a love that is boundless, faithful and everlasting. The discovery of this reality is what truly and profoundly changes our lives".  "It is a love that is limitless and that precedes us, sustains us and calls us along the path of life, a love rooted in an absolutely free gift of God. Speaking particularly of the ministerial priesthood, my predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, stated that 'every ministerial action ... provides an incentive to grow in ever greater love and service of Jesus Christ, ... a love which is always a response to the free and unsolicited love of God in Christ'. Every specific vocation is in fact born of the initiative of God; it is a gift of the Love of God! He is the One Who takes the 'first step', ... because of the presence of His own love 'poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit'.  "In every age, the source of the divine call is to be found in the initiative of the infinite love of God, Who reveals Himself fully in Jesus Christ. As I wrote in my first Encyclical, Deus Caritas Est, 'God is indeed visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, He comes towards us, He seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of His heart on the Cross, to His appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, He guided the nascent Church along its path'".  "The love of God is everlasting; He is faithful to Himself. ... Yet the appealing beauty of this divine love, which precedes and accompanies us, needs to be proclaimed ever anew, especially to younger generations. This divine love is the hidden impulse, the motivation which never fails, even in the most difficult circumstances. ... We need to open our lives to this love. It is to the perfection of the Father’s love that Jesus Christ calls us every day! The high standard of the Christian life consists in loving 'as' God loves; with a love that is shown in the total, faithful and fruitful gift of self".  "It is in this soil of self-offering and openness to the love of God, and as the fruit of that love, that all vocations are born and grow. By drawing from this wellspring through prayer, constant recourse to God’s word and to the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, it becomes possible to live a life of love for our neighbours, in whom we come to perceive the face of Christ the Lord".  "These two expressions of the one divine love must be lived with a particular intensity and purity of heart by those who have decided to set out on the path of vocation discernment towards the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; they are its distinguishing mark. Love of God, which priests and consecrated persons are called to mirror, however imperfectly, is the motivation for answering the Lord’s call to special consecration through priestly ordination or the profession of the evangelical counsels. St. Peter’s vehement reply to the Divine Master: 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you' contains the secret of a life fully given and lived out, and thus one which is deeply joyful.  "The other practical expression of love, that towards our neighbour, and especially those who suffer and are in greatest need, is the decisive impulse that leads the priest and the consecrated person to be a builder of communion between people and a sower of hope. The relationship of consecrated persons, and especially of the priest, to the Christian community is vital and becomes a fundamental dimension of their affectivity".  "Dear brother bishops, dear priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, catechists, pastoral workers and all of you who are engaged in the field of educating young people: I fervently exhort you to pay close attention to those members of parish communities, associations and ecclesial movements who sense a call to the priesthood or to a special consecration. It is important for the Church to create the conditions that will permit many young people to say 'yes' in generous response to God’s loving call.  "The task of fostering vocations will be to provide helpful guidance and direction along the way. Central to this should be love of God’s word nourished by a growing familiarity with Sacred Scripture, and attentive and unceasing prayer, both personal and in community; this will make it possible to hear God’s call amid all the voices of daily life. But above all, the Eucharist should be the heart of every vocational journey: it is here that the love of God touches us in Christ’s sacrifice. ... Scripture, prayer and the Eucharist are the precious treasure enabling us to grasp the beauty of a life spent fully in service of the Kingdom.  "It is my hope that the local Churches ... will become places where vocations are carefully discerned and their authenticity tested, places where young men and women are offered wise and strong spiritual direction. ... As a response to the demands of the new commandment of Jesus, this can find eloquent and particular realisation in Christian families, whose love is an expression of the love of Christ Who gave himself for His Church. Within the family ... young people can have a wonderful experience of this self-giving love. Indeed, families are not only the privileged place for human and Christian formation; they can also be 'the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God', by helping their members to see, precisely within the family, the beauty and the importance of the priesthood and the consecrated life. May pastors and all the lay faithful always cooperate so that in the Church these 'homes and schools of communion' may multiply, modelled on the Holy Family of Nazareth, the harmonious reflection on earth of the life of the Most Holy Trinity".  "I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you, ... and especially those young men and women who strive to listen with a docile heart to God’s voice and are ready to respond generously and faithfully". |
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| **GOD'S LOVE IS STRONGER THAT ANY EVIL**  Vatican City, 12 February 2012 (VIS) - At midday today the Holy Father appeared at the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace to pray the Angelus with faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square below. Benedict XVI introduced the Marian prayer by recalling how "Jesus, in His public life, healed many sick people, thus revealing that what God wants for man is life, life in abundance".  Today's Gospel reading shows us Jesus "in contact with a form of sickness considered at that time to be the most serious", leprosy, which made the sufferer "unclean" and excluded him from social life. While Jesus was preaching in Galilee a leper came up to Him asking to be healed. "Jesus did not seek to avoid contact with the man. Quite the contrary, moved by intimate concern for his condition, He stretched out His hand - breaking the legal proscription - and said: 'I do choose. Be made clean'. Christ's gesture and words encapsulate the entire history of salvation, they incarnate God's will to heal us, to purify us from the evil which disfigures us and blights our relationships.  "That contact between Jesus' hand and the leper broke down all barriers between God and human impurity; between the sacred and its opposite, certainly not in order to deny evil and its negative power but to demonstrate that the love of God is stronger than all evil, even the most contagious and terrible. Jesus took our infirmities upon Himself. He became a 'leper' that we might be purified. ... The victory of Christ is our profound healing and our resurrection to a new life".  In closing, Benedict XVI encouraged the faithful to pray to the Virgin Mary. "Through His Mother, it is always Jesus Who comes to us, to free us from all sickness of body and soul. Let us allow ourselves to be touched and purified by Him, and let us show mercy to our fellows". |
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| **APPEAL FOR AN END TO VIOLENCE IN SYRIA**  Vatican City, 12 February 2012 (VIS) - "It is with great concern that I am following the dramatic and increasing violence in Syria", said the Pope this morning after praying the Angelus. "In recent days there have been many victims, some of them children. I recall them all in my prayers, just as I do the wounded and those who are suffering the consequences of an increasingly worrying conflict. I also renew my urgent appeal to put an end to the violence and bloodshed and, finally, invite everyone - particularly the Syrian authorities - to favour the paths of dialogue, reconciliation and commitment to peace. It is vital to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the various components of the nation, and to the hopes of the international community, which is concerned for the common good of society as a whole, and of the region". |
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| **OTHER PONTIFICAL ACTS**  Vatican City, 11 February 2012 (VIS) - The Holy Father:  - Appointed Archbishop Romulo G. Valles of Zamboanga, Philippines, as metropolitan archbishop of Davao (area 2,443, population 1,477,000, Catholics 1,185,000, priests 157,religious 809), Philippines. He succeeds Archbishop Fernando R. Capalla, whose resignation from the pastoral care of the same archdiocese the Holy Father accepted, upon having reached the age limit.  - Appointed Bishop Nicolas Brouwet, auxiliary of Nanterre, France, as bishop of Tarbes et Lourdes (area 4,535, population 229,000, Catholics 151,000, priests 168, permanent deacons 14, religious 520), France. He succeeds Bishop Jacques Perrier, whose resignation from the pastoral care of the same diocese the Holy Father accepted, upon having reached the age limit.  - Appointed Bishop Jonas Ivanauskas, auxiliary of the archdiocese of Kaunas, Lithuania, as bishop of Kaisiadorys (area 6,557, population 174,000, Catholics 141,200, priests 61, religious 27), Lithuania. He succeeds Bishop Juozas Matulaitis, whose resignation from the pastoral care of the same diocese the Holy Father accepted, upon having reached the age limit.  - Appointed Fr. Linas Vodopjanovas O.F.M., pastor of Kretinga in the diocese of Telsiai, Lithuania, and vice provincial for the Lithuanian Province of "St. Casimir" of the Friars Minor, as auxiliary of Telsiai (area 13,373, population 725,900, Catholics 581,000, priests 157, religious 52). The bishop-elect was born in Neringa, Lithuania in 1973 and ordained a priest in 2000. He studied in Italy and has held a number of positions in his order, including that of master of novices.  - Appointed Fr. Pierre Claver Malgo, former rector of the major interdiocesan seminary of "Saint-Jean-Baptist" in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, as bishop of Fada-N'Gourma (area 47,681, population 1,274,000, Catholics 96,891, priests 49, religious 99), Burkina Faso. The bishop-elect was born in Dimistenga, Burkina Faso in 1954 and ordained a priest in 1984. He studied in his own country and in Cote d'Ivoire and, among other duties, has served as a pastor in France.  - Erected the new diocese of Tenkodogo (area 10,777, population 954,377, Catholics 138,212, priests 50, religious 26) Burkina Faso, with territory taken from the diocese of Fada-N'Gourma and the archdiocese of Koupela, making it a suffragan of the metropolitan church of Koupela. He appointed Fr. Prosper Kontiebo M.I., vice provincial of the Camillian Fathers in Burkina Faso, as first bishop of the new diocese. The bishop-elect was born in Boassa, Burkina Faso in 1960 and ordained a priest in 1990. He studied professional nursing and has worked in his order as formator and bursar.  - Erected the new apostolic prefecture of Robe (area 116,221, population 2,737,512, Catholics 2,000, priests 5, religious 13) Ethiopia, with territory taken from the apostolic vicariate of Meki. He appointed Fr. Angelo Antolini O.F.M. Cap., episcopal vicar for the region of Robe and national director of the Pontifical Missionary Works in Ethiopia, as first apostolic prefect of the new prefecture. |