

## MARIA ROSA MISTICA, MOTHER OF PRIESTLY VOCATIONS AND OF SPECIAL CONSECRATION

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**Conference about Mystical Rose**  
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Among the various promises that the seer Pierina Gilli recounts in her diary, there is one she received on July 13, 1947: *"I promise those religious institutes or congregations that honor me most, that they will be protected by me, that they will have a greater flourishing of vocations and fewer betrayed vocations, fewer souls who offend the Lord with grave sin, and great holiness in God's ministers."*<sup>1</sup> This promise, which is made along with others, is one of the principal characteristics of the apparitions of the Mystical Rose, who presents herself as Mother of the Church, but also as Mother of priestly vocations and those of special consecration.

In this speech, I would like to begin precisely with this promise, namely, the need, today more than ever, to invoke the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his harvest through the intercession of Mary Mystical Rose, and the importance of fostering such a vocation for the Church today.

- 1. Vocation, gift and mystery**
- 2. God calls**
- 3. The person called: need for support in frailty**
- 4. Maria Mystical Rose and priestly vocations and those of special consecration**

### **1. Vocation: gift and mystery**

When we speak of "vocation" or "vocations" in this conference, I will refer specifically to these types of vocations, without however detracting from the importance of the baptismal and lay vocation.

Vocation is a "gift" and a "mystery." This is how Pope John Paul II defined his own vocation in his autobiographical book *"Gift and Mystery,"* where he said: "The story of my priestly vocation? Above all, God knows it. In its deepest depths, every priestly vocation is a great mystery, a gift that infinitely surpasses man. Each of us priests experiences this clearly throughout our lives. Faced with the greatness of this gift, we feel how inadequate we are to it."<sup>2</sup> A vocation is part of a human being's history, but it itself is and has a history. Therefore, John Paul II speaks of the "history of my vocation." History is a temporal phenomenon for the human being, but the particularity of the priestly vocation lies in the fact that it is rooted in eternity: *"The word of the Lord came to me: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations'"* (*Jeremiah 1:4-5*). Because of this origin—which we can call eternal because it is divine—a vocation is difficult to grasp and understand in its entirety. Therefore, the person called is often surprised to be called because he or she does not consider himself worthy, fit, or prepared for the call. Such is the case of the prophet Jeremiah, who replied: "O Lord God, I do not know how to speak, for I am but a child." (*Jeremiah 1, 6*).

Vocation surprises because it is God who bursts, so to speak, into a person's time, presenting a path, a way, a life plan that doesn't always coincide with what the person had already begun or, in any case, isn't within the immediate scope of their aspirations. We find these surprises from God in Scripture, with different calls

but always full of "mystery," because God enters life without asking permission to give it a new perspective. Thus Moses, who was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, priest of Midian, took him to Horeb, the mountain of God, where the Lord, first in the form of an angel, appeared to him in a flame of fire burning in the midst of a bush (Ex 3:1-2). Marveling at the phenomenon of a fire burning without being consumed, he approaches to understand why, when the Lord calls out his name: "Moses, Moses!" (Ex 3:3). He does so twice to assure him that it is he, Moses, who is called, and not another. The one called, this time Moses, without his name being spoken by someone he doesn't know and is not at all unfamiliar to him. There is a blend of closeness and distance, of tenderness and strength in the moment of the call that makes that moment both solemn and familiar.

The Lord bursts into a person's life. He does not do so with warning. He decides when, how, and where. In the call, the Lord reveals himself as the One who has authority over the person, but it is a loving, paternal, familial authority, full of affection.

The mysterious nature of vocation is linked to the fact that it belongs to the supernatural world, a world to which we have access through faith, but which we cannot fathom with reason alone, as we do with the natural world. It is in the supernatural world that we feel on the one hand more unprepared and less protected, and on the other hand more secure, because we perceive it to be a fundamentally loving relationship with the one who calls.

A vocation must be linked to a mission, as in the case of Moses, or one that is revealed over time, as in the case of the disciples, the apostles, and St. Paul. The Lord says to the first apostles: "Come after me. I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). Jesus does not give them a specific mission, but rather a task that is carried out over time, in everyday life: "Come after me." Following Jesus wherever he leads them will be their mission.

Vocation is *the mystery of divine election*: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16). "And no one takes this honor to himself except he who is called by God, as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:4). It is a mystery that the Church guards with great respect; for this reason, every person called is fostered with great love, to help them in the sometimes difficult and difficult process of discernment.

But a vocation comes from a choice, not from merit. A vocation isn't something we deserve, but simply because it comes as a gift and a mystery, and can be accepted or rejected, since the freedom of the called human being must never be suppressed. It is therefore a gift, but also the bearing of a burden, "the burden of the mystery that the priesthood brings with it"<sup>3</sup>.

The gift of vocation must be emphasized first and foremost in every vocation, at the origin of every vocation, and is thus recognized by the person to whom God addresses the call and by the Church herself: "The priestly vocation," says Saint John Paul II, "is a gift of grace, a free calling, which proceeds from divine love. In fact, priestly life cannot be considered a simply human promotion, nor the mission of the minister as a simple personal project."<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. God calls

The fact that God calls a person raises many questions about God's very existence and his relationship with humanity. Special vocations are evidence of this transcendent reality, and are a sign in today's world of God's presence, of his existence, and of the relationship he desires to forge with human beings.

Each person called is a being like any other, with talents, flaws, qualities, and limitations, who sees his life "invaded" by a mysterious, unexpected presence that takes him beyond himself, catapulting him to a new level of existence. A typical example of this is the calling of Abraham. The book of Genesis introduces us to the figure of this man, Abram, ( אַבְרָם – 'Avrām ) its meaning in Hebrew is "exalted father" or "high father." Being exalted as a person, but inferior to God himself, offers the meaning of someone who is esteemed and respected above others and is a point of reference for the life of a society. It is used in the book of Genesis until chapter 17:5. God changes his name to that of Abraham. ( אַבְרָהָם – 'Avrāhām), which means "father of a multitude," is a sign of the covenant. Abram's calling is God speaking to him: "The Lord said" (Gen 12:1). The Lord addresses Abram as He had addressed the beings He was gradually creating, as recounted in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. God "said," and the various works of creation were created (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). God's "saying" underscores that His word is creative. Similarly, God "says" to Abram: "Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). This time, God gives a command to a human being who already exists, with a life like Abram, already mature, already established in his region, existing, with social relationships. It is a command that will only be fulfilled if Abram obeys, if he accepts it. The great difference between Genesis 1 and Genesis 12 is that the imperative and creative command of Genesis 1 is immediately operative: God spoke, and the creatures were created. In the case of a human being like Abram, the fulfillment of the divine command occurs through his freedom. The same is true of every vocation. It is a statement from God that respects the human being. A command that is an invitation and that absolutely respects freedom. A command-invitation, however, that must be associated, in the case of Abram, and in the case of every vocation, with a promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3). This blessing, which must be associated with every vocation, as in the case of Abram, is important because, as in the case of the patriarch, it must be welcomed in faith. Abram believed in God, who credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). The vocation must be welcomed in faith and trust, which are strengthened by the promise of divine blessing that will not abandon the person on the path of life, of that adventure to which God invites him..

When the Mystical Rose promises an abundance of vocations to priestly orders or associations or to special consecration that will have a special devotion to her, to Mary, she is reminding us of an important fact we must not forget: that God continues to call young people or adults to himself and to the ecclesial mission he will assign. The call from God is assured, but in the Gospel we are invited to pray for this intention: "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to his harvest" (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). Prayer helps the community and the person called to welcome it in faith, to be attentive to what the Lord will say to the soul of the individual who will be sustained with graces special to him and to the community that will support him spiritually.

Mary Mystical Rose reminds us, therefore, that the Lord continues to call and that we are invited to pray for this intention and for priestly vocations or those of special consecration.

Indeed, in the rosary called The three Roses, which Saint Maria Crocifissa taught "word for word" to Pierina Gilli, petitions for vocations are found in all the joyful mysteries, and also in two of the joyous mysteries. It is an ecclesial commitment to pray for vocations, a commitment that the Mystical Rose reminds us of in her messages. She is Mother of the Church and, as Mother of the Church, wishes to offer to her the lives of these people whom the Lord chooses to be "workers" in his harvest, in a different way.

### **3. The people called**

God calls human beings, in all their entirety, both in terms of greatness and in terms of human misery. Greatness refers to the dignity of every human being, of every baptized person, in the image of God and called to eternal life. Misery refers to the condition, the human condition, marked by original sin, concupiscence, fragility, and vulnerability, not only on a personal level, but also on a social and ecclesial level. This requires an enormous anthropological realism that must never be lost sight of by the person called, by formators, by the Church, and by institutions.

The Church has always honored vocations, both priestly and those of special consecration, resulting, as a direct consequence, in the production of excellent fruits of holiness, even though it has also experienced moments of great difficulty, because, for various reasons, the profound meaning of the original calling had been lost in the life of institutes and organizations, as well as in the lives of individuals. The result was that, instead of producing fruits of holiness and good works, there was a drift away from the ideal of holiness and perfection, causing scandal among the people of God due to the infidelities, morally corrupt or dissolute lives, and grave sins of which some ministers of God and persons specially consecrated to Him were guilty.

Mary Mystical Rose comes to strengthen vocations with her maternal presence and a pressing invitation to holiness, fidelity, sacrifice, and prayer. It is true that, as Riccardo Caniato points out, at the time of the first apparitions and the corresponding messages, an environment like that of the diocesan curia's leaders might have seemed, in those particular circumstances, unlikely to be "an intervention of the Madonna to denounce the crisis in the Church and denounce the betrayals and bad habits among consecrated persons of which, unfortunately, we have been made aware today."<sup>5</sup>

The moral and spiritual weakness of those called is highlighted by Saint Paul in a famous passage from his letter to the Corinthians, where, speaking of the heralds of the Gospel, he acknowledges having "this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). The treasure he is referring to is the ministry entrusted to him by the mercy of God (1 Cor 4:1) of proclaiming Christ Jesus. But he, aware that he carries within himself the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, the new man and the old man, recognizes that the treasure of the Gospel—we might say the treasure of the vocation to live and proclaim the Gospel—is kept in earthen vessels. It is, therefore, a treasure, but the container is fragile, can break, and must therefore be guarded with great care. Thus, vocations, if well received with due discernment, come to Him who calls, but the person who receives this calling and task is vulnerable.

The question we might ask is: why does God call people who are fragile and vulnerable, full of

wounds? Saint Paul gives an answer: "so that this surpassing power may be seen to belong to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7). Vocation, in fact, is an "extraordinary power." In the Greek expression ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως, we find the excellence of the power expressed, indicating the value Saint Paul places on this ministry of his, on the vocation he received. It is an "excellence" in the power shared by Christ. Yet, this excellence comes from God, not from the person called. And this, in fact, is the experience of every person called: the experience of being prepared, in full or in part, for the mission they are about to undertake and for the vocation they receive. This awareness should humble the person, without leading him to a lack of trust either in himself or in God.

Today, human frailty must also be added to those other frailties that come from the family, society, and the surrounding world, and which make those called more fragile and vulnerable. This is in no way intended to absolve the moral responsibility of those who, in various ways, have failed in the moral obligations of their human, Christian, religious, or priestly vocation. Such statements, on the contrary, are intended to affirm that particular attention is required to the personal work that individuals must do on themselves and to the care that formators, superiors, or moderators must take in providing adequate, comprehensive preparation for the individual to fulfill their vocation and mission.

Those who live their vocation fully, while aware and experiencing their being made of clay, always live a paradoxical experience that Saint Paul describes very well in these terms: "We are afflicted, but not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:8-10).

And it is in this situation that the presence of Mary Mystical Rose enters fully into the life of the person called. The fragility experienced daily will lead one to increasingly turn to her for support in a vocation that requires constant and humble acceptance of one's own limitations and the vigilance and attention to avoid slipping into one's own fragility and sin, and into the constant attacks of the enemy of our souls. Mary Mystical Rose protects vocations because she gives them her own strength, and she protects them with her intercession.

#### **4. Mary Mystical Rose e priestly vocations and those of special consecration**

Jesus Christ plays a fundamental role in the divine calling, as he is the one who calls according to the Father's plan under the action of the Holy Spirit. The call is Christological and Trinitarian and has strong pneumatological aspects. But it is also necessary to highlight Mary's special role in the calling and in the life of priestly vocations and those of special consecration.

Mary's first role is clearly highlighted in the Canaan passage. Mary, present at the wedding of these people, probably known to her and her Son, plays a role of mediation, of intercession in the first sign, the miracle performed by Jesus, according to the evangelist John (Jn 2:11). Mary was there. This is the first observation. She has no particular role, but she is there. In the Greek text there is an ellipsis of the verb, which only indicates the place where Mary was: ἐκεῖ. Mary was "there", she was "there" where her place corresponded to her, the one she will assume in the Church, interceding as Mother, as Mother of the nascent Church, as new Eve, indeed as a figure of the Church cooperating in the regeneration and formation of children with the love of a Mother<sup>6</sup>.

It is she who finds herself at the right time and in the right place at Canaan, who tells Jesus laconically "they have no wine" (Jn 2:3). In this moment of celebration, the lack of an element of great importance for the celebration becomes evident: wine. This same lack of vocations is also highlighted today by Mary Mystical Rose, when she promises, instead, to perform the miracle thanks to her maternal intercession. It is she who says again, like Mystical Rose: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). Here too, we are talking about a "saying" and a "doing." It is Jesus who must speak his word, his command. It is he who calls. The servants are those who must "do." The miracle is performed by Jesus with his word, but the servants cooperate with their actions thanks to the intercession of Mary, who plays an undeniable role in the emergence of new vocations.

During the long years in Nazareth, Mary had helped shape her Son for his priestly mission, fostering the development of the spiritual and human qualities suited to his future mission. Pope Saint John Paul II said that "when Jesus reveals his meek and humble heart, open to all, welcoming and benevolent, full of compassion for the unfortunate, he will offer everyone the fruits of a development in which Mary played a notable, albeit hidden, role"<sup>7</sup>.

Vocations that arise from the heart of Mary Mystical Rose will also be especially protected by her maternal care, not only at their inception but also during the highly important period of formation and the subsequent mystery. In this school of ongoing formation to which the person called is bound, Mary is called to receive constant support and constant encouragement to trust in the hidden power of the Holy Spirit, which the person called possesses, in order to communicate, according to their specific vocation, the grace of Christ. Filled with the Holy Spirit, from the first moment of the Annunciation, Mary leads the one called to "recognize and respect the action of the Holy Spirit" in their own life and in the lives of those with whom they live and work<sup>8</sup>.

But when Mary, in a special way, reveals herself in the life of the person called, it is precisely at the moment of suffering, as she did with her Son beside his cross on Calvary. There, Jesus recognizes his mother and entrusts her to Saint John, newly appointed priest and bishop at the Last Supper. At the Last Supper, Mary Magdalene, a person totally consecrated to the love of Jesus, is beside them. Jesus asks her to take the disciple as her son: "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19:26). Saint John Paul II says that "by giving the beloved disciple to Mary as her son, Jesus established a universal motherhood by virtue of which Mary would have as her children all Christians, indeed all those in Christ who were called to receive salvation, that is, all men."<sup>9</sup> Mary's motherhood extends to all Christians, and this motherhood is offered as the final and supreme gift of Jesus on the cross to all humanity. In this way, every man, every Christian, and, in a special way, every person called to a special vocation has a mother who leads them along the path of grace: Mary. This mission of Mary must be underscored by the spirituality that emanates from the Mystical Rose. In this regard, Pope John Paul II adds that "Mary has become in a very special way the mother of the priest. She is charged with overseeing the development of priestly life in the Church"<sup>10</sup>. The spirituality of the Mystical Rose must have among its specific tasks that of fostering, safeguarding, and protecting vocations, as well as the formation and integral development of vocations.

From this spirituality, concrete initiatives can arise to help priests and consecrated vocations to have a filial relationship with Mary. Here in this sanctuary, they will be able to nourish themselves with this

spirituality, where priests and consecrated souls will be invited to take Mary with them as John did, bringing her into their homes and into their environments of life, formation, and ministry. To take Mary with them: this was the privilege of Saint John. This is the privilege of priests and other vocations. Thus, they will learn to believe as Mary believed, to hope as Mary hoped, and to love as Mary loved. Thus, they will be able to place their plans, difficulties, loneliness, anguish, worries, joys, fears, and anxieties before her gaze.

All we have said leads to a very simple conclusion, but one that must always be remembered and reinforced. Mary Mystical Rose invites Christians to pray for vocations. It is true that she promises abundant vocations to those who are devoted to her, but part of that devotion consists in praying for vocations to the priesthood and to special consecration.

A prayer that, as has been said, the Lord, Master of the Harvest, may send workers to his harvest. But also a prayer for those who have already undertaken this path and need the continued spiritual support of the people of God.

A prayer for vocations that must be supported by appropriate vocational ministry. The Sanctuary of the Mystical Rose at Fontanelle must therefore be a place eminently vocational, where prayers are offered for vocations, where vocations find refuge, comfort, and spiritual and human support to pursue their vocation. A place where those who have been wounded can heal; where those who are tired can regain their strength, and where those who have lost enthusiasm can rediscover it. A place of faith and hope, open to charity and mission. A place of mercy given and received, a place where glimpses of God open in a world where there are still so many spiritual deserts.

We can conclude by remembering and reciting the prayer often recited in this shrine and recited by devotees of the Mystical Rose: "Mystical Rose, Queen of the Apostles, make numerous religious and priestly vocations flourish around the Eucharistic Altars so that, with holiness of life and ardent zeal for souls, they may extend the Kingdom of Your Jesus throughout the world! Fill us too with your heavenly favors!" Amen.