

The Young Woman's Calling

An address of Pope Pius XII to Members of the Young Women's Section of Italian Catholic Action

Quattro mesi
July 13, 1958

About four months ago, beloved daughters, a throng of joyful youth crowded this St. Peter's Square, and We were encouraged to confide to them Our hope that a better future was in the making for the Church and, through the Church, for the entire world.

This was not the result of that sudden enthusiasm which might easily have come in the presence of such a superb spectacle. Nor did it rise from a desire to stir the young to action and to a peaceful struggle for the advent of Christ's Kingdom.

Rather, We were moved by a need to express Our convictions to that immense crowd of young folk, evoking the picture of a spring that comes after a cruel winter and forebodes a fertile summer laden with fruit.

This expectation of Ours is strengthened today as We observe the happiness of your faces, think of the perfume of your souls, and contemplate the divine life that is in you, radiating from your whole being.

You, my beloved daughters, are certainly in the flower of your youth, in the flower of life. You are therefore the flower of the Church, the flower of humanity, the flower of the world. You are flowers that are always marvelous in their countless variety.

I

There is a great variety among flowers as a result of the places where they grow, the seasons of blooming, the cultivation they require, the differences of color and perfume, and the variety of uses to which they are put.

The flowers of spring

The first gift of spring is the primrose, little stars filled with perfumed nectar, often level with the grass or bent over by their own weight on a delicate stem.

There are flowers that bloom alone at the end of a stem or that join in groups of varied forms or compactness.

There are flowers that bloom from the bottom to the top of but a single stem, and others that bloom at the end of their stems in various length and on many branches, giving the impression of one large flower.

Mountain and field flowers

There are mountain flowers, exposed to the rigors of cold, to showers of torrential waters, to the powerful lash of the winds.

There are field flowers that bud and grow almost without order or particular care. Some of these are gathered and others are left to fade or be trodden under foot.

The garden and greenhouse

There are garden flowers which lie waiting during the last days of winter and then suddenly,

almost unexpectedly, burst into a multicolored carpet.

There are flowers of specially chosen types for which the earth is cultivated and special plant food obtained.

And there are hothouse flowers, grown in that adjunct to the garden which is designed for the cultivation of plants that would not bloom in the open air or would come to flower slowly: flowers from an area where everything is conditioned – light, heat, humidity – where they blossom and grow and multiply with hardly any contact with the outside atmosphere, but at the same time must have air, when the temperature permits it so that they will not rot or grow in a weakened condition.

II

We were speaking of flowers, my beloved daughters, and Our thoughts turned constantly to you.

The winds and tempest

May it not be, perhaps, that some of you are like the mountain flowers, exposed to the assaults of the winds and the buffets of the tempest? What then must be the mockery that you sometimes bear, and the insinuations by which some try to lessen the splendor of your spiritual charm?

What are the acts of contempt by which men seek to discourage you, and the invitation to evil which would attempt to entwine your souls and even bind them in the shackles of guilt?

Unattended flowers

Others are like the field flowers, because in their case there is no one to attend to them properly – little wild flowers that the Young Women's Association of Italian Catholic Action has not discovered and gathered together – like so many of you who would have been deprived of help and would not have developed, or would have seen their stems bent and their petals scattered, but who now embellish and adorn the world in which they live.

Cultivated gardens

However, it can be said that the greater part of you were born and grew up in well cultivated gardens. The association was able to take you in its arms when you were still very small: it supported you when you were babies; it guided you, holding you by the hand when you were children; and it was with you when as teenagers, you took your first steps along the road of the spiritual life and of apostolic action, with fear and trembling.

Today, as young women, it comforts you, illuminates you and instructs you in the first encounter with life, in the first conflicts of your sometimes tormented youth. Those of you who live as if in greenhouses – certainly find in the Association of Catholic Action, as in other similar organizations that the Church blesses and recommends, a suitable means to profit more and more from the particularly intense care that is given you.

III

While We were speaking of the varied assortment of flowers, We hinted at the different uses for which they are destined.

Here We should like to pause for a moment and mediate on two types of flowers that in one way or another should include all of you.

There are flowers that remain as such always and are destined to be plucked without ever germinating new life. There are other flowers that beautify the plant and, when their petals have fallen, give way to fruit.

Consecrated virginity

a) Some of you – not all and not the majority – will be called by God to a life of consecrated virginity. We would be doing an injustice to your generosity and to your constant enthusiasm if We feared to speak frankly to you, as a father should who confides his anxieties to his daughters and knows that they are all ready, anxious and unconditionally dedicated to Christ and the Church

Look at the world, my beloved daughters. It seems to be indifferent to spiritual values, often even hostile to things that remind it of God, His demands and desires. At the same time it invokes the presence of Christian virgins whenever there is weakness that needs support, wherever there is comfort to be given or there are tears to be dried.

Orphans need a mother; the sick require disinterested and loving help; the aged beg for filial support; parents and guardians ask for schools and institutes directed by Religious; missions cry out for legions of women consecrated to God.

The Pope knows the numerous requests that come in every day; that, although so many young folk in different walks of life are idle and complain sadly “*nemo non conduzit*” (Matt. 20, 7) “No man has hired us” it should be a case of repeating almost in anguish, “*mensis quidem multa*” (Matt. 9, 37), “the harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few.”

Therefore, should it be that the Lord really calls you, answer generously with a “Yes,” renouncing father and mother, a human spouse and children. If the Lord really calls you, you must give them all up and must even sacrifice yourselves.

But have no fear. This sacrifice offers an indescribably profound joy on this earth and a special crown of glory in heaven because you will be among those who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Apocalypse 14,4).

The married state

b) There are others among you – and they are the large majority – whom God has called or soon will call, to be flowers who will not remain as they are, because one day they will have to bear fruit, if God so wills, in a holy family.

On various occasions We have had to correct the error of those who maintain that the Christian virgin is a mutilated and incomplete thing, something that does not fulfill the perfection of its own being. On the contrary, virginity is like an angelic way of life and by its excellence is a state superior to that of matrimony(cf. Encyclical “*Sacra Virginitas*,” March 25, 1954, A.A.S., 46 (1954), pp. 161-191). But on the other hand, this superiority does not in any way decrease the beauty and the grandeur of married life.

Wife and mother

Therefore, my beloved daughters, be conscious (from this moment on) of the greatness of the Christian wife and the Christian mother. If your awareness of this fact is clear and timely, you will be induced to omit nothing that will help to prepare you adequately for the sublime mission that awaits you.

One day – We wish it for you paternally – you will kneel at the foot of the altar and beside you will be a young man who is resolved to spend his life with you. That day you will be bound by a tie which has God as its author, the substance of which is most noble and the consent to which is sacred.

The sacrament of Matrimony

Marriage is a contract which Jesus deigned to elevate to the dignity of a Sacrament, including it thus among the things that seem to be, and are, the meaningful and salutary effects of the Incarnation.

Being truly God made man, human nature became the true instrument of life for the Divine Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Thus the human works of Christ were the works of God, and consequently have a divine value. Since the Incarnation is the mystery by which a human body and soul, together with the Divine nature of the Word form one single person, so it was that the Apostle John could write, "The Word was made flesh" (John 1,14)

The effect of grace, which is conferred "according to the measure of Christ's bestowal" (Eph. 4,7), is that men with their soul, intelligence, will, and action, and also with their body, are made really participants in the divine nature and become children of God. In this way also Christian marriage acquires a special dignity, and by virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony a human institution – the family community – is transformed into an instrument of divine action. Therefore it is directly sanctified and your conjugal union itself receives a very particular imprint of God.

Holy Spouses

But if your state one day will be so great, if one day you will be called to be the cooperator of God in the transmission of life, it is necessary that there be born in you, and always grow stronger, the determined will to be holy, and to be so as brides, in your conjugal union itself and in the very exercise of your love.

Side by side with the pure ranks of the virgins, which We hope will grow larger with each passing day, there will also be in this manner multitudes of holy spouses.

These will not be satisfied with asking God for the simple blessing of their love and their union, but they will beg Him to plant a mystic seed in their souls, made almost as one with their husbands – a seed that will flower and bear fruit in the sanctification of themselves and of their offspring.

Blossom and multiply!

Beloved youth of Catholic Action, in this springtime of the Church, you must flourish: "florete flores." All attempts to make you wither and rob you of the perfume that is your charm must find you indomitable and prepared for any trial.

Blossom, beloved daughters, and multiply. Multiply as the flowers multiply: those that are jealously guarded in greenhouses; those cultivated in gardens; those scattered in the fields, and those that wave on the crest of the mountains.

Blossom and multiply, but try to acquire more and more every day the consciousness that there are other flowers and other flowerbeds in the magnificent garden of the Church. Beloved daughters, look upon all the flowers and all the flowerbeds with great affection and with an unshakeable spirit of cooperation. The very blossoming of your souls will be subject to the blossoming of charity among you.

Look to Mary

There is a Woman, as you know, upon whom God willed to rest His gaze with infinite tenderness, having destined her to be His Mother.

His omnipotent love kept her crown of virginity intact and at the same time gave her the honor of bride and the dignity of motherhood. Look to her as your unsurpassed and unsurpassable model.

Look to Mary, lily of the valley, who nevertheless bore fruit by the Holy Spirit and gave Jesus to the world. If you look to her, if you imitate her, your freshness will remain intact, your perfume will remain unaltered and your charm unchanged

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